

71 GAMES INSIDE
Must-read news, features, previews, and reviews!
PLUS! HEADSET SPECIAL OFFER INSIDE!
PS4
PC
3DS
PS VITA
iOS
GAMES MASTER
KILLER TIPS AND TRICKS
BECOME A WINNER TODAY!
TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX SIEGE
PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS
FORTNITE
OVERWATCH
THE SHOOTER SPECIAL
DISCOVER THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST GAMES
PLUS!
HANDS-ON
ONRUSH
The triumphant return of arcade racing
SHADOW OF THE TOMB RAIDER • FAR CRY 5
CYBERPUNK 2077 • YAKUZA 6 • KIRBY
SEA OF THIEVES • SUPER SMASH BROS
HANDS-ON
JURASSIC WORLD EVOLUTION
Creating a dino park with help from Jeff Goldblum
FUTURE



Issue 329 / May 2018

"Use our expert guides to transform into a winner"

The year is 2018. PlayerUnknown's BattleGrounds is now the official national sport of every country on Earth. Fortnite is more popular than food and oxygen combined. And the only art that's legal to create is fan drawings of your favourite Overwatch ship. There's no escaping it: we live in a new era for online shooters.

It's natural to feel a little overwhelmed or behind the curve, but of course if you don't get up to speed fast, you'll soon be sent off to a Battle Royale Re-education Island, and no-one wants that. Instead, just read everything you need to know about the world's biggest games right here in our packed cover feature – and use our expert guides to transform yourself into a winner.

Once you've finished your main course of shooty bang bang stew, we've got loads of delicious dessert for you too – including hands-on previews of brilliant upcoming titles such as Jurassic World Evolution and Onrush, an in-depth look at representation in games, reviews of the month's must-play titles, and much, much more.

Enjoy your GM!

Robin Valentine – Editor

GET MORE FROM YOUR GM!



Online at www.gamesradar.com/gamesmaster



...or subscribe. See p34 for details.

EDITOR'S CHOICE
MY TOP PICKS THIS ISSUE



10 Nintendo Switch has an absolute flood of amazing indie games coming – read all about 'em inside.



42 Smoke And Sacrifice brings beautiful world-building and slick storytelling to survival games.



90 Our resident RetroMaster runs down the best 'Doom clones' – the early shooter pioneers.

Contents

What's In Your Latest Issue?





GM Previews

GM Reviews

GM Regulars

Team GM

Meet The Magazine's Makers!



THE MOST DEDICATED TEAM IN THE BUSINESS

GamesMaster is just like a battle royale game, only instead of 100 people on an island, it's three journos in an office, and instead of killing each other, they just make a magazine. And then kill each other.



Robin Valentine

The age of shooters has been tricky for editor Robin – his twitchy fingers and primitive reaction times make him a truly awful marksman. Still, at least he's not bad at hiding in bathrooms for hours on end. That's actually pretty similar to his typical workday.

Favourite shooter ever:
Left 4 Dead



Rob Crossland

Our art editor's a man of many hobbies. His latest extracurricular activity? Hatching himself a whole flock of hens with his new incubator. We will, of course, be dropping them all on an island and seeing which one survives. Winner winner chicken dinner indeed.

Favourite shooter ever:
Battlefield 4



Sam Greer

Staff writer Sam's hot takes are getting so spicy that they're actually starting fires around the office. We almost lost half this issue when she asserted that "They should make another Riddick movie," the resulting blaze engulfing our paper-laden desks. She is a monster and she must be stopped.

Favourite shooter ever:
Halo: Combat Evolved

Issue 329/May 2018



Future PLC, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA

Editorial
Editor **Robin Valentine**
robin.valentine@futurenet.com
01225 442 244
Art Editor **Rob Crossland**
Operations Editor **Miriam McDonald**
Staff Writer **Sam Greer**

Contributors
Alex Avard, Matthew Castle, Natalie Clayton, Anne-Marie Coyle, Ian Dransfield, Ian Evenden, Phil Iwaniuk, James Jarvis, Luke Kemp, Lauren O'Callaghan, Laurence Phillips, Chris Schilling, Alan Wen, Ian Wilson

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**
clare.dove@futurenet.com
Account Director, Games **Kevin Stoddart**
kevin.stoddart@futurenet.com
01225 687 455
Director of Agency Sales **Matt Downs**

International
GamesMaster is available for licensing. Contact the International department to discuss partnership opportunities
International Licensing Director **Matt Ellis**
matt.ellis@futurenet.com

Subscriptions
Email enquiries **gamesmaster@myfavouritemagazines.co.uk**
UK orderline & enquiries **0844 848 2852**
Overseas order line and enquiries **+44 (0)1604 251045**
Online orders & enquiries **www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk**
Head of subscriptions **Sharon Todd**

Circulation
Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Clare Scott**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Manager **Frances Twentyman**

Management
Managing Director **Aaron Asadi**
Commercial Finance Director **Dan Jotcham**
Editorial Director **Paul Newman**
Head of Art & Design **Rodney Dive**
Group Editor-in-Chief **Tony Mott**
Senior Art Editor **Warren Brown**

Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd on behalf of Future

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9060

Next issue on sale 17 May 2018

SSN 0967-9855



Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief executive **Zillah Byng-Thorne**
Non-executive chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief financial officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

FANBASE

The best of your emails, tweets, and carrier pigeon death threats

2017 felt like one PR disaster after another for EA – the developer needs to come back swinging in 2018.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Stuart asks, has EA ushered in the end of single-player games?

It's hard to understand how modern publishers and developers could think that a single-player experience is something we don't want. I love the fact that the indie scene gives me games like I used to play back in the day, but publishers such as EA seem to be giving the gaming scene a bad name.

Being one of the big boys with their loot boxes and paid games as a service is okay if it is a 'take it or leave it' situation, but don't make other developers follow suit to the peer pressure. There are many games that we won't get the chance to play because the developer thinks playing on your own is a bad thing and they won't make their money. I remember when two-player used to be a treat, and an extra area or character to play as used to be a bonus to be earned and not paid for. I really like my single-player games with a good story or grind. Don't let that experience disappear because you think it may not work any more, because you can't shoehorn in pointless money- making schemes.

Stuart Gregory, email



Reception to Battlefront II's loot boxes was so negative that microtransactions were removed from the game.

Single-player games definitely aren't going anywhere any time soon! There have been plenty of hugely successful solo games in recent years, from The Witcher 3 to Breath Of The Wild. And looking ahead, we've got the likes of God Of War, The Last Of Us Part II, and more to look forward to.

EA seems to be rethinking its lootbox-based business models, too. It's clearly not taken the Battlefront II controversy lightly, and we suspect we'll see a very different approach in its future games. ■

WIN!

Got an opinion? Have even the barest grasp of words and how to put them together? The best letter bags a free mystery prize!*

*Don't forget to include your postal address and chosen gaming format!



CONTACT US

Email gamesmaster@futurenet.com

Twitter www.twitter.com/gamesmaster

Facebook www.facebook.com/officialgamesmaster

Web www.gamesradar.com/gamesmaster

Post GamesMaster, Future, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1AU, UK

Grohl with it

A question for you GamesMaster: isn't it about time we had an unnecessary crossover between a videogame and a rock band? I think you'll find the answer is yes, and I have just the solution: FooFite Battle Royale. The battle bus can become a tour bus and the band can leap onto the island harvesting material with giant guitar axes.

Anyway, any further suggestions for crossover titles?

Paul Jones, email

Sorry that we've not printed the ace PhotoShop of the Foo Fighters that accompanied this email – we feared Dave Grohl's lawyers would have us for breakfast...

As for crossovers – how about Guns N' Rabbids? Tupac Man? Jet Set Radiohead? [*Please stop* – Ed]

Doctor doctor doctor

Hey Gamesmaster, I wanna say a big congratulations on making it to 25 years of gaming greatness. I've been a loyal reader since 2007.

My favourite time that I've been reading was when I was featured in the Doctor Who special three times in one issue. I still have the magazines in my room to prove it too!

Congrats on 25 years of gaming coverage and many more in the future!

Liam Davis, email

Thanks very much Liam, glad you enjoy the mag! We'll let you know if we ever do another Doctor Who special...

The write stuff

I'm a huge fan of your magazine and have been for a long time. I'm also a big fan of the written media around gaming. I have nothing against streamers – but I'm worried that it could be another sign that people are turning away from written news and reviews. What are your thoughts on this?

Also your awesome magazine inspired me to start up my own news and review website called TriForce Reviews. I write about gaming, movies, and novels. I'm hoping that enough people still enjoy reading enough to help make my new website a success! I'd love to create a community like you have with your Facebook and Twitter pages.

I'm also impressed to see that I am not the most long-distance subscriber! [Stan lives in Ontario, Canada.]

Stan Cohen, email



READER REVIEW

Charlie Ridgewell writes in with their verdict on **Doom**

In an era when story and cinematic cutscenes are pushed front and centre more than ever, Doom bucks the trend. It's a game that emphasizes chaotic, gory fun over everything else. Better still, the game is fully aware of its ridiculousness,.

Gameplay is frenetic and faster than any other shooter I've played, forcing you to be aggressive rather than get behind cover. You're encouraged to injure demons with your gun before performing a takedown, a fun and unique loop that rewards you with brutal animations and precious health. And as you progress and are given bigger demons to kill, the takedowns only get gorier.

Whether you're trying to find your way to the next area while enjoying some downtime, or killing the biggest demon yet with your chainsaw, Doom is infectiously enjoyable. There's very little story, all of which is self-aware. There's just you and rooms full of demons. Can you ask for anything more from a Doom game?

100%



"TITANFALL 2 IS THE BEST ONLINE SHOOTER OF THIS GENERATION"

Video definitely seems to have taken over as most people's primary source of gaming content, with written news and reviews far less popular than they once were. That's fine though – publications such as ours offer a very different style of coverage to streamers or YouTubers, and we reckon there's room for both.

Good luck with your website!

Buddy up

What's the best multiplayer game to play right now?

Monster Hunter is great for co-op, and Titanfall 2 is the best online shooter of this generation, hands down.
That Glasgow Gamer, @ThatGlasgwGamer

Battlefield 1. No question about it. The game that has kept on giving (with its excellent DLC) for the best part of a year and change.
Chris Canning, @ChrisCanning24

TimeSplitters 2. Buy a PS2 or Xbox... Load it up and have the best FPS ever.
Jon Gates, Facebook

You're all wrong – the correct answer is the Jackbox Party Pack.

Gen thinking

What features do you want to see from the next generation of consoles?

Backwards compatibility or else I'm not getting them!
Andrew, @halo1nine

Cross console compatibility. I want to play FIFA/COD online with Xbox players while on my PS5!
Dave, @chandydave

60 frames per second as standard. Games just feel so much better.
Alex Eagles, @cynibot

I want it to have the capacity to make me a sandwich.
Kenny Lomas, Facebook

It's a small thing, but we'd really like to see game controllers with longer battery lives – keeping all your wireless pads charged enough is a pain as it stands, especially if you play a lot of local multiplayer. ■





OFF THE CHART!

The hot topics you've been gabbing about

25% The greatest videogame hero of all time
23% Your favourite co-op games
21% EA's big Battlefront II updates
19% The best battle royale games
12% Your multiplayer gaming habits

YOUR TOP 5 MOST WANTED

The most exciting upcoming games, as voted for by you on our Facebook and Twitter pages



1

RED DEAD REDEMPTION 2

Format PS4, XO **ETA** 26 October
Wait, isn't this actually the third game? Poor Red Dead Revolver, always forgotten. It feels like we'll never find out what Red Harlow did next...



2

GOD OF WAR

Format PS4 **ETA** 20 April
We're hard at work on our review of Kratos' intriguing return – you'll find that next issue. In the meantime, just try to stay calm, okay?



3

SPIDER-MAN

Format PS4 **ETA** Summer
Fingers crossed this game will feature that storyline where Spider-Man grows extra arms and turns into an arachnid monster, eh? Good times.



4

THE LAST OF US PART II

Format PS4 **ETA** Winter 2019
Now, whenever this game is mentioned, all we can think about is that mo-capped dog. What's its name? Will it be our friend? Can we pet it?!



5

SUPER SMASH BROS

Format Switch **ETA** Winter
There's something a bit sad about the idea that, when all of Nintendo's lovable characters get together, they immediately start walloping each other.

YOU LOVE GAMES

Cool stuff and videogame culture

Ray Netley's huge collection features over 157 amiibo – can anyone out there beat that?

Jacob Bachmann (@SpaghettiPirate) was inspired by Sea Of Thieves to draw this piratey piece!

@A4manArtist wrote in to show us these awesome 3D models he's made for Firaxis and Valve.

SCREENSHOT SHOWCASE

This month's best snaps



Farming Simulator 15
Toby William Allen, Facebook



Animal Crossing: Pocket Camp
Ray Netley, Facebook

Shadow Of The Colossus
Ali Al-Sahi, email

SOCIAL GROUSING

Wisdom and weirdness from our bustling social media channels



I'm struggling at the counter in Morrisons trying to choose between a brie and camembert. Haven't even made it to the pickle aisle yet and it closes in nine and a half hours.

Mike, @mike_robbo



Wario's the greatest videogame hero ever, of course. He wears denim and he bathes in garlic, that's pretty damn heroic.

Jake Mcaulay, @Thedirtwizard

MANIAC OF THE MONTH!



This is it people, my doggo screenshot made it into GamesMaster magazine. Where can I even go from here?

Georgina Howlett, @howlettwrites



Just got Ni No Kuni II King's Edition. Has to be one of the best special editions I've ever gotten! Now I just need to stop drooling over it long enough to play the game...

Daniel Reid, Facebook



Would you still go all '90s style and print a pencil drawing of Sonic ripping off Mario's head, and vice versa? If it was all tasteful like.

RetroBob, @RetroBob



Streets Of Rage 2 on MegaDrive was great for co-op. You could hug the other player... and then ground slam them if they got on your nerves!

Roxy Clark, @RoxyReport

Pity any fowl who has to share a toilet with Bomb Chicken. "You might wanna leave it five minutes, mate."

Just Shapes & Beats lives up to its name – only you can't hear the sound here, so on paper it's Just Shapes...

WORLDS APORT

Nintendo fans get to try some classics this year, too



A remaster of Klei's stealth classic Mark Of The Ninja comes to Switch in autumn.



Enhance Games brings a remastered version of puzzler Lumines, with local co-op and HD rumble, in spring.



Spring's console-exclusive release of Asymmetric's PC adventure West Of Loathing promises lots of laughs.

NINTENDO GOT THERE INDIE END

We intendo tell you about 2018's parade of indie titles for Switch



The independent games scene is a vibrant and exciting place. Switch's portfolio in this respect is slowly growing, and this year will see some superb additions. We're very excited about Fantasy Strike for example, a cartoony fantasy beat-'em-up (currently in Steam Early Access) determined to welcome new players. One character allows you to *hit people with a ghost*, another can stop time, while yet another is a panda that gambles. And that's just one game! Join us as we take a look at what else is coming to shake up Switch's portable world.

Just Shapes & Beats, from Berzerk Studio, isn't quite like anything else we've seen. The self-described "musical bullet hell" game comes with a full story mode, which can be enjoyed solo or with up to three other people. Pool Panic from Adult Swim Games and Rekim, meanwhile, is a cross between pool and a platformer, with over 100 levels and local multiplayer for up to four people. Unlike the previous two games, which launch in summer, this intriguing title's release date is currently just "2018".

Prepare to be excited about TinyBuild's Garage's spring launch. Inspired by old so-bad-it's-good VHS (ask a historian) movies, this top-down shooter pits you against mutants and zombies. Fancy something less violent? Maybe Pode from Henchman & Goon is more your scene. Also due in the spring, it's a co-op adventure (also playable solo) where the two cute little characters must use their differing talents to help one another progress.

"JUST SHAPES & BEATS, FROM BERZERK STUDIO, ISN'T QUITE LIKE ANYTHING ELSE WE'VE SEEN"

Cluck and cover

What if you want cute *and* violent? Nitrome has you covered with Bomb Chicken, establishing its place in the pecking order in the summer. You play as a chicken which lays bombs, an idea which has us sold already. Stack your bombs to reach higher ground, and, *of course*, use them to blow stuff up. Sounds finger lickin' good.

Remember Shu? We suspect Bishop Games does, as its intriguing platformer Light Fall has some similarities. Similarly fast paced, you'll need to summon your 'Shadow Core' with precise timing as you repeatedly bounce off it in mid-air to avoid hazards and whizz through each level. With a dedicated speedrun mode and online leaderboards, this is sure to prove a timesink for many when it launches in spring.

The Messenger from Sabotage Games has our attention, and not only because you play as a ninja. Jumping between 8-bit and 16-bit worlds, you'll enjoy old-school gameplay complete with upgrades, new abilities, and hidden levels when it hits in summer. Plausible Concept's Bad North, another summer launch, doesn't have ninjas but it *is* a RTS game with roguelike gameplay, and permadeath for your commanders.

That's still not all! Switch will be getting an exclusive bundle of Nerial's Reigns and Reigns Her Majesty in spring, which even includes local co-op. Throw in The Banner Saga 3 (with the first two games to be ported "soon"), and Nintendo's in for some lovely indie weather. ■



We have to say, we're with Lara on this one – live by the man-bun, and you die by the pickaxe.



Alicia Vikander did seven months of training for the role and performed nearly all her own stunts. She really *is* Lara.



If your hotel room peephole glows yellow it's probably a sign it's cursed. Better not ask for room service.

NEW CROFT ON THE BLOCK

Excavating the new **Tomb Raider** film



Forget everything you know from Angelina Jolie's portrayal. This Tomb Raider, much like the 2013 game, is a reboot in every sense if the word.

Now played by Swedish actress Alicia Vikander, 2018's Lara is much more grounded and believable than the back-flipping, robot-killing, overconfident version of 2001. If you've played the game then you'll already be familiar with the plot, but there are still a few surprises along the way.

The film opens with Lara struggling to get by. Working as a bike courier in central London, she's determined to make it on her own without help from the Croft empire, but she can't even afford to pay for the gym where she gets a beating in the ring every week. Times are tough for 'I want to *try* this normal life thing but if it gets too much I'll take the money' Lara. A quick bike chase later and she's doing just that – but not before a hidden note from her dad leads her to the Japanese island of Yamatai.

Crew cut

It's here that the game's plot takes over (minus the annoying crew) and Lara is soon on a quest to find Sun Queen Himiko's tomb. The set pieces are lifted directly from the game but they're still impressive, even if they're a little familiar, and Vikander manages to make you believe that although she's handy with a bow, Lara is new to this adventuring lark, most notably in a standout scene around her first kill. (And no, it doesn't involve a deer.) This isn't just a film that reboots the Lara Croft franchise, it should be the new benchmark for videogame movies. ■

GM VERDICT



A decent film based on a game? Vikander does the First Lady of PlayStation proud.

The Burning Question

What's the best videogame movie ever?



Advent Children
Beautifully animated and only added to the world of FFVII.
Nadia Ortubia, Facebook



Resident Evil
Because Milla Jovovich of course. It kept most of the lore while being its own entity.
Mark Warby, Facebook

Visit www.facebook.com/officialgamesmaster and www.twitter.com/gamesmaster to take part in next issue's burning questions.

> "DOESN'T JUST REBOOT THE LARA CROFT FRANCHISE, IT SETS THE NEW BENCHMARK FOR GAME MOVIES"








You'll spot more than a few favourite characters (Lara!) in this battle scene.


Wade Watts will do anything to protect Halliday's legacy and keep the OASIS out of the wrong hands.

"CRAMMED WITH MORE '80S VIDEOGAME, MOVIE, AND TV REFERENCES THAN YOU CAN SHAKE A VHS TAPE AT"

VIRTUAL REALITY CHECK

It's got Ryu, Lara, and Tracer – but is **Ready Player One** any good?



With digital worlds more mainstream than ever, what better time for Hollywood to put virtual reality front and centre? Steven Spielberg returns to his sci-fi origins to bring Ernest Cline's novel about a young geek fighting for his (VR) world to the big screen, and he's created a breathtaking story.

Like Wreck-It-Ralph, or the recent Jumanji sequel, Ready Player One is very much about games even if it doesn't adapt one specific title. It's set in the not-so-distant dystopian future, where pretty much everyone lives, works, and does almost everything else in the VR world OASIS created by the late, great James Halliday, who hid a secret somewhere inside.

Finders keepers

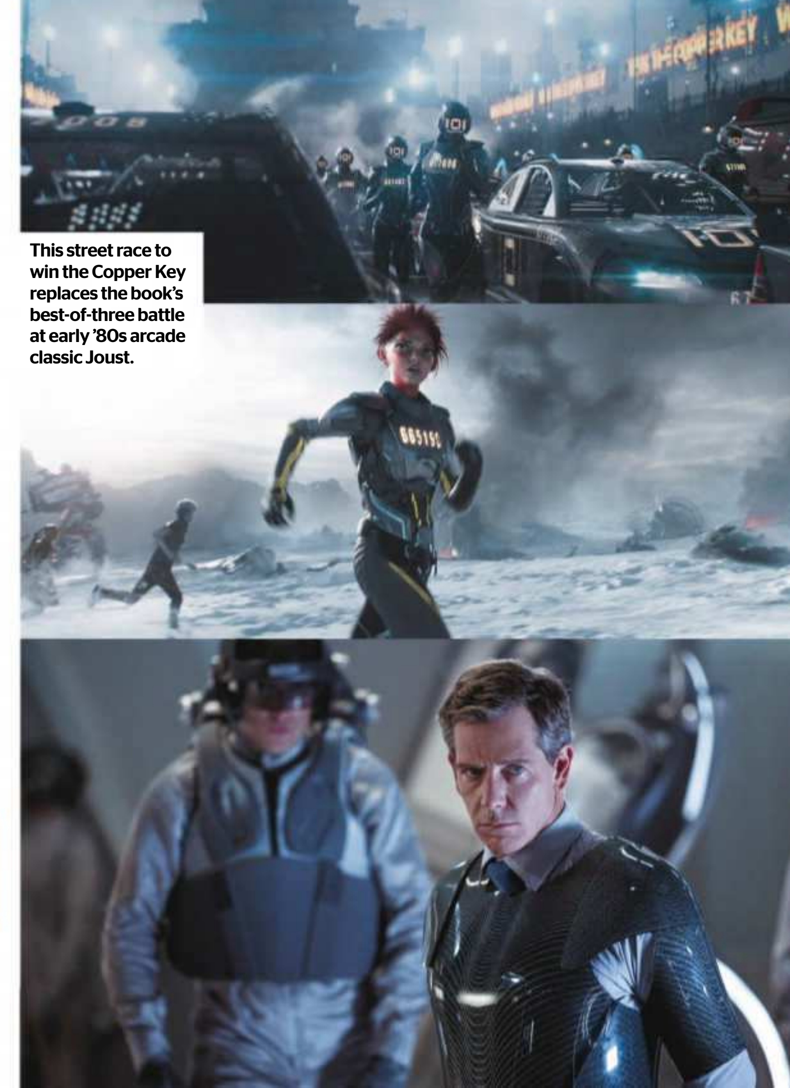
Whoever finds it will inherit his fortune and ownership of the virtual world, but while die-hard Halliday fans such as Wade Watts (Tye Sheridan) and his friends want to protect the OASIS, which has become more real to them than the real world, the head of tech company IOI, Sorrento (Ben Mendelsohn), wants it for his own financial gain.

Fans of the book may be disappointed with the major storyline changes, but if you can let that go, there's a rich CGI world here to enjoy. Crammed with more '80s videogame, movie, and TV references than you can shake an obsolete VHS tape at, the characters may lack the emotional depth to make this a ground-breaking movie, but as big, beautiful blockbusters go, Spielberg's landed a hit right on our nostalgia nerve centres and struck gold again. ■

GM VERDICT



A well-crafted CGI spectacular that leans heavily on its pop culture references.


This street race to win the Copper Key replaces the book's best-of-three battle at early '80s arcade classic Joust.

A COLD SHOULDER TO DIE ON

Surviving **The Wild Eight's** Alaskan hell with just a few surprises



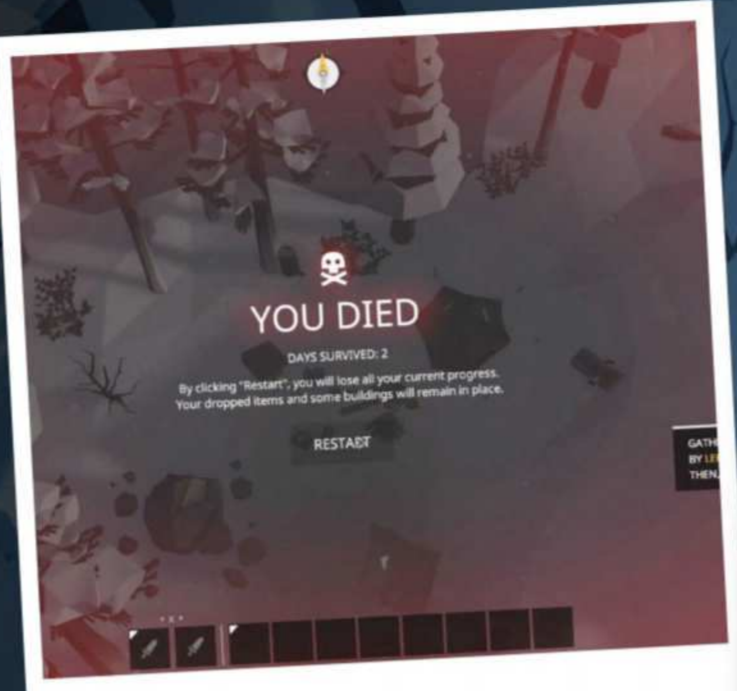


The Wild Eight is a top-down survival game all about crafting, scavenging food, and avoiding wolves while trying to stay alive in sub-zero temperatures. In many ways it's a lot like a third-person The Long Dark. You might remember Leon playing that before and freezing to death. Guess how he gets on here...



5 MINUTES

Day one... (Shut up, this is day one. You're just imagining any previous day ones.) Pro tip for the first time you play The Wild Eight: make sure you pick up enough wood to start a fire once you've built it. No-one wants to freeze to death next to a fully functional but unfuelled fire. I mean, how humiliating would that be? (Cough.) Once that's done you want to build a crafting station to make basic axes because punching trees is really hard on the knuckles. This is 100% trad survival – collect wood and rocks, eat berries. It's much like an afternoon at a craft fair, only with more wolves. Oh, and you got there via a plane crash and everyone else died. It's just you, dangerous animals, and all the dream catchers you can eat. As far as craft fairs go it's not getting a great write up. One star tops.



0 MINUTES

Day one. If I've learned anything by now with Hurley Access it's never to get cocky. The Wild Eight is a harsh survival game set in Alaska, and named after the eight characters you can play, each with different perks and abilities. I pick William for his +5 cold resistance, because survival games have taught me that if you *can* freeze to death, you *will* freeze to death. And as it happens, I *do* freeze to death – my cold, frozen bottom handed back to me within literally minutes. Worst of all, I die right next to the fire I've just built because, as it turns out, in The Wild Eight 'building a fire' and 'lighting it' are two separate things and I only collected the wood to make it. I'm so embarrassed. Thank God I don't have to write about this in a nationally published magazine or anything.



20 MINUTES

I've actually lived long enough this time to work out what I'm meant to be doing. After scavenging the wreckage for supplies, I've located an underground bunker. It's not much but it's out of the cold, relatively wolf free, and has potential. There's a crafting bench, a place where I can grow food, and some other bits and pieces to fix up. It's basically a home base to use as I explore and try to find a way to escape. There are shacks to investigate and power lines to follow, giving the map an almost post-apocalyptic feel – there must have been other people living here in the frozen wilds at some point but where did they go? Oh yeah, a ghost also attacked me and put my fire out but I'm sure that's probably fine... Time to explore and get some answers. And food. Mainly food.



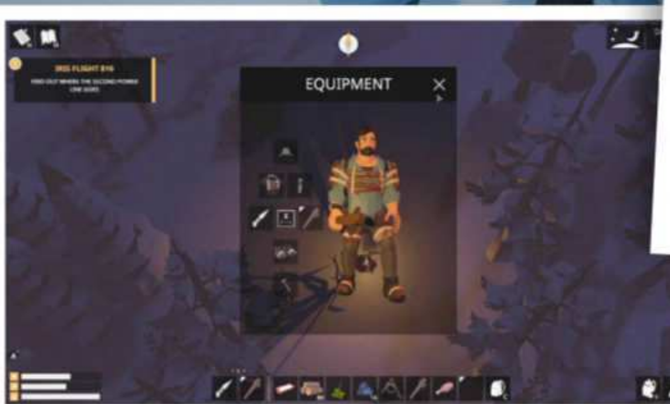
45 MINUTES

I mainly run from wolves now. "What did you do yesterday?" someone might ask. "Ran from wolves," would be my reply. "And today?" they might continue. "Wolves again," I would say. "And what about tomorr...?" "Wolves. It's just wolves." There is nothing in this icy hell hole except running away from angry dogs that have been to the gym. And they did *not* skip leg day. I'm exhausted from holding the shift key down to sprint. I've hidden from them in buildings and an old bus; I've built a fire and poked them with burning sticks to keep them away. I am now an expert in pissing wolves off. "This man avoids being eaten every day. Wolves hate him – number six will amaze you," I mutter as I weave through the trees, teeth snapping at my heels.



1 HOUR

I get a break from the wolves when I find a radio station that might let me call for help if I can get it going. I start to explore and in the darkened depths I find a werewolf prowling arou... Wait, *what?!* Yep, on two legs, looks like he *does* skip leg day. It's a werewolf. As I look on with a mixture of fear and confusion I notice a sign that reads "Harrington Radioactive Waste Repository'. Oh, this can't be good. And it's not as, while I get the power on, he kills me with one swipe of his claws. Fortunately, death is a bit Dark Souls here – you just go back to your last base and have to get your gear back, which also now includes my own remains as a piece of human flesh.



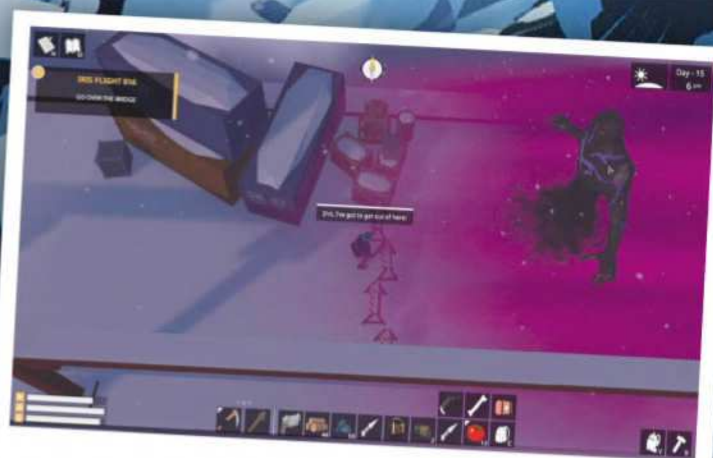
1 HOUR 10 MINUTES

Eat me. I mean *I* eat me. Partly out of curiosity, because you don't often get to eat any human flesh, let alone your own. And also because all I've eaten since the last page has been berries and mushrooms. I taste good judging by the health recovered. I'm starting to make decent progress. I've learned how to make snares so I can catch rabbits – which I wish I'd known about before I ate my own leg. I've also learned how to make wooden armour, which looks a lot like I've taped sticks to myself. I can only assume the protection comes from the wolves laughing so much I have time to run away. I hope I can craft something that's good at getting splinters out of nipples.



1 HOUR 30 MINUTES

The progress continues. I've found some tomato seeds that I've grown back at base, giving me plenty of food. I've killed a wolf using a sharpened rabbit bone – I hope he's up in big dog heaven feeling embarrassed about that. I've also found an anti-radiation helmet that's basically a big scary gas mask, and made progress on escaping. I've been scouring bunkers – including one with a sentry turret I had to use to blow the doors in – and powering up generators all over the place that's led to the discovery of a bridge, which is potentially a way out. Covered in wooden armour, with all the tomatoes I can eat, it feels like now is the time to make a break for it. I am *leaving*.



2 HOURS

Bears! There are bears everywhere! Suddenly I miss the wolves. I've made it to the bridge and all hell has broken loose. I'm so busy fending off bears, and some sort of zombie ghoul, that wolves are a long-forgotten memory. Through a careful mix of setting fires and running away I manage to make it to a gatehouse that opens up a way to the bridge. This is it, I'm going to make it! I'm going to get... What on Earth is that?! A man appears on the bridge, tells me there no way out, shoots himself, and turns into a giant purple ghost that smashes the bridge to pieces, destroying my escape route. 'End Of Part One' appears on the screen. I think we can all agree no-one expected that to happen. Probably a good place to stop, I reckon. I've got to start getting these splinters out.

SNOW IDEA WHAT'S GOING ON

For all its weirdness there's a lot to enjoy in The Wild Eight. The crafting is basic, almost mobile game level, but then this is in Early Access and by the developer's own admission has a way to go. The core of scavenging supplies, making stuff, and levelling up abilities is rewarding. It's probably worth waiting, though, as one of the main pillars of the game is meant to be an eight-player co-op mode. However, that's recently been ripped out and is being rebuilt, making the online mode all but unplayable. Check in when it's fixed because trying to co-ordinate survival with up to seven friends, while juggling wolves, cold, and weird ghosts looks like a lot of fun.





"Choose correctly, and even more stressful games can be a panacea for anxiety"

Counter-intuitively, Laurence Phillips thinks that challenging videogames can help when dealing with stress and anxiety



For those of us unfortunate enough to suffer from it, anxiety is like fine wine... actually, scratch that, anxiety is more like really terrible wine. To the untrained eye, it's all the same – but to the seasoned connoisseur there are many unique flavours to be grudgingly experienced. And you really won't want a refill.

Playing videogames while suffering from anxiety can be a delicate balancing act. Choose the wrong kind of game for the wrong kind of mood and a controller is going to be sailing through the nearest window pretty quickly. But choose what you play correctly, and even more stressful games, which you might expect to make things worse, can be a panacea for anxiety.

It's worth noting that dealing with any mental health problem is an incredibly personal process, and what works for one person won't necessarily work for someone else. This isn't a guide on how to deal with your anxiety, it's a sharing exercise that will hopefully provide some tips worth trying out.

Primal Rage

When the stress burns hot and anxiety turns to frustration, I have one golden rule: I avoid games that make me feel powerless. Getting kicked off the edge of a cliff by an invader in Dark Souls or eating a long combo in a fighting game, even if it's one you love most of the time, is a quick path to a broken console. Better are slower-paced challenges that require focus but don't feel unfair – roguelites such as The Binding Of Isaac and FTL are difficult, but the challenge is a gradual slope, not a wall. Strategy-based games such as XCOM and Europa Universalis force you to slow down your frenzied brain and do some planning, which can force you to focus your attention on the activity and get you out of the danger zone.

"THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER IS THIS: KNOW YOUR LIMITS"

When the anxiety is a slow drudge through hopeless misery, applying your brain to something cerebral can be difficult. Instead, try a game that gives you a short, sharp challenge. Focusing on a simple yet difficult goal can refocus your stress into something that's achievable in the short-term. Taking a run at a Super Meat Boy level or trying to get an S-rank in Bayonetta can be very cathartic, as long as the challenge is achievable to you. Replaying a game you know well but with a unique challenge, such as speed-running, can also be effective.

The most important thing to remember is this: know your limits. If gaming isn't helping with your anxiety on this occasion, try something else – another game, or even an entirely different activity. Challenge is relative, and banging your head against a brick wall (or having it banged for you in that fighting game) is never good. Find a game that provides an achievable challenge for you personally, and give it a try, it just might help! ■

STATS MAGIC The gaming month in facts and figures

359.5
Million: the number of arrows used by Horizon Zero Dawn players, according to stats recently released by developer Guerilla Games.

18.2
Million Thunderjaws were killed by vigilant hunters on their journeys through post-apocalyptic Earth.

40.7
Billion bits of arrow-crafting Ridgewood were collected. Hoarders really pulling their weight here.

668
Thousand: the more meagre number of times The Frozen Wilds' chilly Icerail was used by players.





"You wouldn't casually swap the terms interstate and intercontinental!"

This month Sam Greer's flamethrower of anger is turned towards crimes against space terminology and the consequences for poor audiences



Nothing makes me furious quite like the misuse of words. Every day we must endure frequent inappropriate usage of 'irony' or 'literally', or suffer the horror of seeing terms such as 'high concept' applied wrongly. How many times has the phrase 'begs the question' been misused? Uncountable.

Among these abuses of language there is none greater than the misuse of those terms describing our cosmos. Descriptive terms are swapped around until all understanding is lost. How often have you seen Star Wars described as intergalactic? Once I even heard Call Of Duty: Infinite Warfare, a game set entirely within our own solar system, as interstellar. Madness, absolute madness.

Poor, unwitting audiences are being duped daily by this gross misuse. How many bought a ticket to see the Christopher Nolan's sci-fi epic Interstellar only to be utterly disappointed by the revelation that the film is really an intergalactic story? Too many! How many purchased Halo on the promise of an interstellar campaign only to find themselves anchored to a single star? Crushing. There is truly no end to the suffering endured by unsuspecting customers, misled by this casual dispensing of inappropriate terminology. Enough is enough.

Take off

Those phrases are not interchangeable, people! You wouldn't casually swap the terms interstate and intercontinental. Words mean things. Yet we constantly mix up terms such as interplanetary, interstellar, and intergalactic like they mean nothing. This assault upon language and science is set to erode our understanding of untraversable and unfathomable distances we never encounter in our day-to-day lives. What will become of our distant descendants when they want to meet up at the weekend but end up with their plans ruined because a friend said they were going interstellar when they meant intergalactic? It's a crisis waiting to happen, and if we do not take action now there is no telling how many generations will suffer as a result of our ignorance.

We must combat this immediately. Write to your publishers and game developers, your MP and parliament. Let them know you will no longer stand by and witness this crime against language and good sense. No issue could possibly be more important than protecting which terms should describe distances in the cosmos which we have absolutely no way to travel. Otherwise the next time you get excited about a new intergalactic videogame, you might just find it's not only not intergalactic but it's not even interstellar! Nobody deserves to have their dreams of intergalactic games crushed like that. You deserve better.

So let's get to work people and make the sacrifice nobody else is willing to make. To suffer in the name preserving very exclusive and practically irrelevant space terminology.

Think of the children! ■

"YOU MIGHT JUST FIND IT'S NOT ONLY NOT INTERGALACTIC, IT'S NOT EVEN INTERSTELLAR!"



What's most tickling the team's fancy this month





ROBIN'S PICK

Mario Tennis Aces

Between Mario + Rabbids Kingdom Battle and Super Mario Odyssey, my level of affection for the moustachioed plumber and his pals is at an all-time high, and this sports spin-off looks stuffed with Nintendo's signature goofy charm. Between the Piranha Plant stage hazards, brilliantly over-the-top special moves, and Chain Chomp as a playable character (he holds the racket in his mouth! That's just adorable), I'm excited to take my first step into the world of Mario Tennis.

Switch - 22 June



SAM'S PICK

Mount & Blade 2: Bannerlord

Sometimes you want a game to take you somewhere pleasant. At other times you want to become a roaming warlord who won't let anything stop her in her quest to destroy the kingdoms of every man who scoffed at her arrival in their halls. As long as this sequel lets me shove it in their smug faces, it's a winner. Maybe I'll even pick up some tips for my ongoing conquest of games journalism, too.

PC - Winter



HELL YES

The lauded action-horror game Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice has finally made its way to Xbox One. Now Xbox players can experience this moving and harrowing adventure for themselves, including its exquisite visuals, innovative audio 'hallucinations', and the outstanding performances – we gave it a whopping 93% at review. There's also support for improved graphics on Xbox One X.



JEDI RETURN

As part of a major overhaul to Star Wars: Battlefront II's maligned progression system, EA is making all heroes and hero ships available to all players for free, and has promised that going forward only purely cosmetic items will be available to buy with real cash.



TOXIC AVENGERS

Riot Games, Blizzard, and Twitch are all banding together to combat toxic gaming behaviour as part of the Fair Play Alliance, which features over 30 companies in total. We hope to see real results from the initiative – we want everyone to be able to enjoy games.

UBI-SAFE

Mammoth publisher Vivendi has ceased its attempt to mount a hostile takeover of Ubisoft, selling all its existing shares (including some back to Ubisoft) and agreeing not to purchase any more for five years. Meanwhile Chinese games giant Tencent is investing in Ubisoft, with plans to release as-yet-unnamed Ubi games in China.

Topping the leaderboard this issue



No, we don't want to continue thanks



SHOCKING NEWS

Developer Nightdive Studios' remake of the 1994 classic System Shock has been delayed until 2020. Yikes. This despite the game receiving $1.35 million on Kickstarter in 2016, and having already released a playable demo. Nightdive has said development wasn't going as planned to meet fans' expectations. Meanwhile, weirdly, System Shock 3 is still in development over at Otherside Entertainment, release date TBA.



GOOD KNIGHT

Square Enix has announced it's ending service for mobile title and Final Fantasy XV spin-off King's Knight: Wrath Of The Dark Dragon. The publisher says "We would like to express our sincerest apologies for ending the service but we hope you have enjoyed your time with the game." The title is an in-game favourite of Noctis in Final Fantasy XV so we expect the Prince to be less than happy about Square Enix's decision.



DANGER ZONE

The Zone Of The Enders: The 2nd Runner remaster has been delayed until September, an unfortunate delay for fans of the classic Kojima mech game, which had originally been pencilled in for a spring release. The remaster promises updated and improved visuals and VR support. We can only hope the delay doesn't spell trouble for the game, and we can all get the chance to revisit this overlooked gem this autumn.

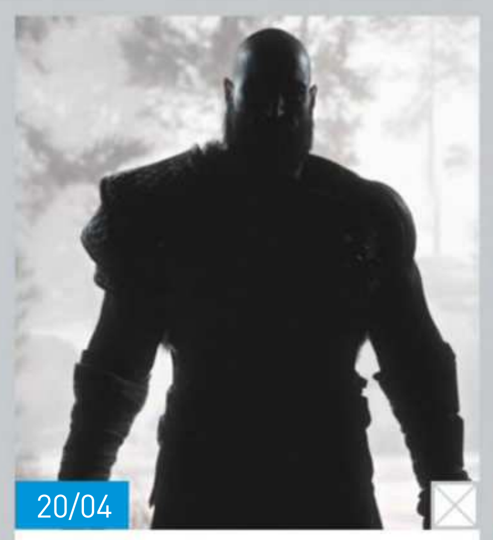


OH-NO-WATCH

In esports news: the Overwatch League's Code Of Conduct has been leaked, revealing that Blizzard has ownership of participating pro players' likenesses and backstories as well as the right to install 24/7 CCTV in team houses and practice spaces for the purpose of a reality TV show. The pros are also, unsurprisingly, not allowed to say a bad word about Blizzard or Activision titles. Controlling, much?

THE GM TO DO LIST

Crucial dates for your gaming diary. If you only do one thing this month, eat, but otherwise make a note of these events...



20/04

NORSE SO EASY

Sony's new take on God Of War arrives today, axe in hand and child in tow.



20/04

CUT IT OUT

Nintendo Labo is out now – ready to reconnect with your inner child?



23/04

DRAKE DOWN

St George's Day is here – anyone up for slaying some dragons in Monster Hunter: World?



24/04

PUNKED

As the weather warms up, you can stay cool with Frostpunk, out today.



04/05

DONKEY KONG-ING AT YA

Sidescrolling platformer Donkey Kong: Tropical Freeze makes its way to Switch today.



08/05

NO WAITING FOREVER

Pillars of Eternity II: Dreadfire arrives on our shores, bringing seafaring to the RPG sequel.



08/05

BY CROM!

Survival multiplayer game Conan Exiles leaves Early Access for a full release today.



17/05

SHOTS FIRED

GM330 goes on sale today, serving up your monthly helping of hot gaming news!

INCOMING

Six big releases headed to a format near you...

01



State Of Decay 2
Format XO, PC
Out 22 May

02



Dark Souls Remastered
Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC
Out 25 May

03



Detroit: Become Human
Format PS4
Out 25 May

04



Onrush
Format PS4, XO
Out 5 June

05



Vampyr
Format PS4, XO, PC
Out 5 June

06



Mario Tennis Aces
Format Switch
Out 22 June


PEREIRA



LOCKED & LOADED

Delve into the biggest and best shooters in the world

We live in a bold new era of multiplayer shooters. The joys of online ranged combat have never been so popular – Fortnite alone has 45 million players – or so rife with potential. But keeping up isn't easy, and that's where GamesMaster comes in.

Over the following action-packed pages we'll take you on a tour of duty through every essential online shooter experience available. If you've never played them, we're here to tell you why you should and how to get started. If you're already embracing the shooter revolution, we've got all the latest on your favourite game and tips for mastering it. So read on, soldier – you might even learn something...



A NITE TO REMEMBER

*How **Fortnite** transformed into 2018's must-play shooter*

DREAM STREAM

Share your game with the world

After pro-streamer Ninja nearly broke the internet when 600,000 people watched him play Fortnite with international superstar Drake in March, it cemented the game's status as a Twitch heavy hitter that's as much fun to watch as it is to play. If you're interested in starting up your own Battle Royale broadcast, all you need is a Twitch or YouTube account with capture software installed on your PC, and you're ready to go. The intuitive broadcasting options on the Xbox One and PlayStation 4 also make it viable to boot up a livestream straight from your home console with the press of a button.

Last summer, Fortnite was barely a hamlet-sized dot on 2017's exceptionally crowded map of games. Developer Epic had released its PvE survival/crafting/tower defence hybrid as an Early Access product in July but, as is the way in such a competitive market, it quickly became overlooked as other, bigger titles began to hit store shelves.

Fast forward to today, however, and Fortnite is one of the most popular multiplayer games across PC, consoles, and mobile, not to mention a regularly streamed colossus on Twitch, having confidently surpassed the popularity of PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (see p26) after reaching 45 million registered players earlier this year. Celebrities tweet about it (including, bizarrely, comedian Roseanne Barr), mainstream news channels report on it, and analysts are calling it the biggest game in the world. To call it a comeback story would be an exercise in understatement.

Fortnite's unexpected rise to fame and fortune is a turnaround for the ages, then, and one that can be specifically traced back to a single moment in Fortnite's history: the arrival of Battle Royale.

Embracing the unknown

Released as a free PvP mode in September 2017, Battle Royale takes explicit inspiration from PUBG. In it, 100 players are dropped onto an ever-shrinking island arena to join in a last-man-standing fight to the death.

As the first Battle Royale game to hit consoles, beating PUBG's strained arrival on Xbox One by a fair few months, Fortnite immediately began to pick up steam, riding on the favourable tracks laid down by PlayerUnknown's PC phenomenon earlier that year. Like PUBG's rise to popularity, the Fortnite: Battle Royale craze has spread partly through word of mouth, with its no-cost, instant access nature being its key selling point, drawing players to it at an impressive rate.

Millions are logging on to Fortnite and playing Battle Royale on a regular basis (as we go to press, the record for concurrent players online is three million), thanks to the fact that Epic is updating the game almost every week with new environments, weapons, events, items, and a host of quality-of-life improvements. Anyone who has been playing Battle Royale from day one will appreciate how far the game's come since launch, and that was less than a year ago.

Its replay value isn't just a product of healthy post-launch support and a productive relationship between developer and community, though. Fortnite's unique blend of crafting and



SAVE THE WHAT NOW?

The PvE mode is a whole new world...

Most Battle Royale players may not even realise that Fortnite has a fully-fledged PvE mode, let alone one that was originally intended to be the game's core feature. But you should consider picking up Save The World even at its Early Access price tag, not least because any V-Bucks earned freely throughout its campaign can be spent on cosmetic items in Battle Royale. What's more, Epic's comprehensive tutorials offer a great way of learning advanced building techniques that can then be applied to your PvP tactics for securing that sweet Victory Royale online.

creative combat makes it a Battle Royale game that keeps revealing new layers through player-driven discovery. Early matches were made up of people playing the game not much differently to how they would a rudimentary third-person shooter, blithely firing their guns at each other and maybe building the odd stairway every now and again.

Today, experienced players are deploying a wide variety of advanced and frankly astounding tactics, from surfing RPG rockets to scaling mountains at breakneck speeds and building immense sky fortresses layered with traps. To the naysayers who regard Fortnite: Battle Royale as nothing but a lazily made PUBG clone, then, that line of arguing is only losing cachet as the game continues to achieve more of its true potential.

Royale with cheese

But Battle Royale is accessible to any interested players, not just the hardcore battlers. Its cheesy tone and buoyant visuals are a breath of fresh air compared to the tense militarism of its peers, cultivating a welcoming atmosphere that makes the game fun even if you're never likely to earn that coveted Victory Royale. Similarly, crafting may be difficult to master, but it's easy to learn, allowing anyone to employ the most basic but crucial strategies (building stairs to scale heights, quickly putting up walls as cover, and so on) for surviving in Battle Royale's addictive bouts of multiplayer mayhem.

Epic could never have expected a throwaway mode it came up with and released in the space of just a few months to become so popular. Nonetheless, the developer has promised that big plans are in the works for keeping this train going at full throttle, and we believe it. In less than a year, the studio's successfully brought the game to mobile, doubled the frame rate on console, completely overhauled the entire map, and broken several world records in the process.

What's more, later this year at E3 2018, Epic plans to stage a grand 'Party Royale' tournament, in which 50 pro streamers will play alongside 50 "of the world's greatest athletes, musicians, and entertainers" (in other words, famous people) for one momentous Battle Royale. If this is just the beginning for a game which, technically speaking, isn't even out yet, then the future is looking very bright indeed for little ol' Fortnite.

"FORTNITE'S UNIQUE BLEND OF CRAFTING AND COMBAT MEAN IT KEEPS REVEALING HIDDEN LAYERS"

DEEPER THAN YOU FORT

Learn these handy tricks and work your way towards that Victory Royale

BEGINNER

GETTING AROUND



When you're starting out, drop as far from the bus as possible to reach quieter areas while you find your feet. If others drop nearby, veer away to a different location so you can look for weapons and materials undisturbed.

While you're searching buildings for items, make sure you cover your tracks by closing doors behind you and not breaking down any external walls. Likewise, if you see open doors or damage then enemies have already been there so proceed with caution.

Turn your volume up or use a headset if possible, as being able to pinpoint approaching footsteps or nearby gunfire can give you a real edge. If you followed the previous tip on closing doors, hearing one creak open lets you know someone has entered your building.

Be prepared to move when the Storm starts closing in. Don't worry about getting caught in it early on as the initial damage rate is low, but don't drift too far away from the safe zone or you won't have time to make it back.



WEAPONS BASICS



Your first priority with weapons is to grab an assault rifle and a shotgun, as these will cover you for both ranged and close combat. Keep your shotgun equipped while exploring buildings and other enclosed spaces, then switch to the assault rifle when moving to open areas.

Check your weapon types, either as you pick them up or by highlighting them in the backpack menu. Some have scopes attached or are set to burst fire, and you don't want to be surprised by holding down the trigger and only producing three quick shots in a fight.

Grab as much ammo as you can – even if you spot a weapon the same or inferior to one you already have, run over it to collect any nearby ammo automatically. Watch out for the small black ammo boxes, as they can easily be missed on shelves or hidden in corners.

FINDING LOOT



Chests will be your main source of loot, so listen out for their telltale chime as you get near and use it to locate them. If you hear one above you, be careful not to break the floor directly underneath it or you'll destroy the chest.

Supply Drops begin falling from the sky as the Storm closes in, so look out for big yellow balloons in the sky or the blue flares marking their landing zone. They contain better loot than Chests, so be prepared for a fight to claim them when they touch down.

Supply Llamas spawn in three random locations per match, so keep a look out for these rare, brightly coloured piñatas. If you're lucky enough to find one, you'll get 500 Wood, Stone, and Metal, plus 10 stacks of each ammo *and* a mix of three consumables and traps. Ay caramba!





Gliding down into the world of Fortnite Battle Royale can be a pretty daunting experience, with 99 other players also gunning for that elusive number one spot. After sinking countless hours and racking up some Victory Royales of our own, we've put together a set of tips to help both beginners and experts raise their game.

EXPERT

PRO CONTROLS



In the Settings menu, switch your Wireless Controller configuration to Combat Pro, as this makes it much easier to toggle your harvest weapon, and to hot-swap between guns using the shoulder buttons. Don't wait to reload during a heated battle when you can jump straight to another loaded weapon.

Under Game settings, turn on Tap To Search / Interact so you can quickly empty Chests and apply healing items to yourself without having to hold the prompt. This also means you won't accidentally stop reviving a teammate by slipping off the button.

Also in Game settings, activate the Controller Auto-Run option so you can double-click the left stick then release it to continue sprinting. This is particularly useful when outrunning the Storm over long distances.

BUILDING SKILLS



When harvesting (smashing stuff up) for resources, hold down the trigger, then aim towards the moving blue target – you'll hear a chime every time you hit it. Not only does this destroy what you're whacking twice as fast, but you'll receive extra materials for it as well.

Practise building quickly so you can defend yourself while under fire. Dropping four walls around yourself in a square with a ramp inside gives you a fast, protected position which is easy to see out of and return fire from, and can be extended upwards as necessary.

Learn the shapes you can make by editing existing building items. You can insert windows and doors into walls by removing the relevant shapes, and ramps can be turned into staircases. Editing your way past obstacles is quicker than smashing through them.



ADVANCED WEAPONS



When selecting a weapon, consider both its damage rating and its DPS (damage per second). If you're an accurate shot at close range than damage is more important, but if you tend to spray or are fighting at distance then DPS should be your deciding factor.

During a quiet moment, use the backpack menu to drop your items and reorder your inventory. Place your assault rifle and shotgun (or similar) next to each other, so you can swap between ranged and up-close weapons in a fight.

Remote explosives are not very practical to use during straight combat, but they are excellent for setting traps. Consider sacrificing a Chest or even a Supply Drop/Llama as bait, then place some charges and hide nearby until you can detonate as your enemy approaches.

Silenced weapons can be great for getting in stealth attacks without giving away your position. If you see two enemies fighting, take some undetected pot shots with a suppressed gun, then sneak in to finish off the last one standing.



GM Feature

On The Cover!

SHOOTING STAR

*Once a battle royale underdog, **PUBG** rapidly became the star of Steam*

STYLE & PROFILE

Dress for the job you want, they say...

The fashion sense of the PUBG development team is... interesting. It's like journeying through the closet of an uncle having a mid-life crisis. Half of it is boring, pedestrian clothing – T-shirts, polos, jeans, sensible shoes, and zip-up jumpers. The other half is biker/goth chic – leather jackets, spiked gloves, anime tank-tops, short skirts, rocker boots, and trench coats. The most recent batch of clothing features a collection of "desperado" outfits, which apparently means "Ezio Auditore if he were a Hell's Angel."

Only a little over a year ago, PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds was released in Early Access to an unsuspecting gaming world. The brainchild of former ARMA modder Brendan Greene (the eponymous PlayerUnknown), PUBG was delivered in early 2017 by then-little-known South Korean mobile developer Bluehole. Though the game had a winning concept from the off, few could have predicted its meteoric rise.

Only a few months into PUBG's time in Early Access, its concurrent players started increasing almost exponentially. 400,000 players in July became 800,000 in August, which became 1.5 million by September, breaking DOTA 2's record to become the most-played game on Steam. By the time it came out of Early Access, PUBG had three million concurrent players, and to date has sold over 30 million copies. Since its official release the active playerbase has dropped, currently floating around 2-2.5 million, but it's still the most played game on Steam. It's been theorised that the recent drop is due to Chinese players (who make up 40% of the active playerbase) waiting for the official Chinese release by Tencent Games – so maybe PUBG will hit new records in the year to come.

Hit formula

What it is about PUBG that has made it such a smash hit? You could point to many factors: almost every game is different; it's a fun team game to play with friends; it's very popular to stream; and it's quick and easy to drop into a game. More important than all of these, however, is the simple fact that for a long time no other game was quite like it, not until its success spawned copycats. The battle royale format is compelling. The feeling of open-world freedom, the awareness that at any moment a shot could ring out and end your run, the excitement of finding good loot, the panic of being overrun by the dreaded circle of death, and the nerve-destroying tension of the final moments. Until you've been there – crouched in the foliage, watching the skyline for any hint of movement – it's difficult to appreciate how powerful an experience it can be. Whether by gunning down your foes like Rambo, or by being a sneaky opportunist, finally winning a game outright and getting that chicken dinner is one hell of a rush. It's not surprising people



flocked to experience it for themselves, and until games like Fortnite came along, PUBG was the only way to do it.

PUBG crawl

The game's development since it was released on Early Access has been largely incremental: a performance update here, a new weapon or vehicle there. The first hotly anticipated update was the addition of custom matches, allowing players to come up with their own spins on the battle royale format (including an inevitable zombie variant, which was later added as an official game mode). First-person-only matches were also made a core option, for those players who really want to rack up the tension. Not all the additions were so well received. Halfway through its time in Early Access, it was announced that PUBG would have microtransactions – specifically lootboxes. Controversial at the best of times, many balked at them being included in an Early Access game in particular. Despite this PUBG continued strongly, adding its biggest pair of updates in the final month before it left Early Access: vaulting, allowing players to hop over fences and climb in windows, and a brand-new map, the South-American-themed desert map, Miramar.

So what's next for Steam's most-played game of all time? New maps seem to be in the pipeline. The dev has mentioned two more potentially coming later in 2018: a smaller 4x4km island map, sure to create a faster, more intense type of match; and an Adriatic island with snow-covered mountains. Also in the pipeline are weapon skins, an event mode, an emote system, updates to graphics, sound and animation, and additional options for custom games. PUBG Mobile has been released – maybe it'll even make the transition to portable systems and grace Switch one day. At this point, the sky certainly seems to be the limit.

"WINNING THE GAME OUTRIGHT AND GETTING THAT CHICKEN DINNER IS ONE HELL OF A RUSH"



ARE YOU CHICKEN?

Life is cheap in PUBG, but here's how to increase your worth



LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

Knowing when and where to drop at the start of each game is one of the most important factors in PUBG success. That big military base will give you some premium gear, but you can't use it if you're dead. Watch carefully to see where other people are dropping, and watch for parachutes during your descent. If you're a beginner, try to drop somewhere secluded – you won't get the best gear, but you'll survive long enough to learn the ropes.



BEWARE THE CIRCLE

The death circle closes faster and does more damage as it gets smaller – the first few take a long time and deal minimal damage that can be healed through, the last few are deadly and impossible to outrun. Always be aware of where the circle is and where it's going, and try to get out of its travel path quickly. Beware of circle campers, people who wait in buildings on the edge of the circle, ready to pick off panicking runners.



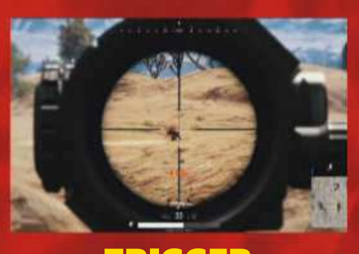
LISTEN

Wear headphones and crank up the volume! Locating potential threats by listening for distant gunshots is essential, and by listening carefully you can also gauge the drop-zone of airdrops, the closeness of the death circle, and the location of enemy vehicles. If you're being sniped at you'll hear the whizz of the bullet before you hear the gunshot – every second of reaction time counts.



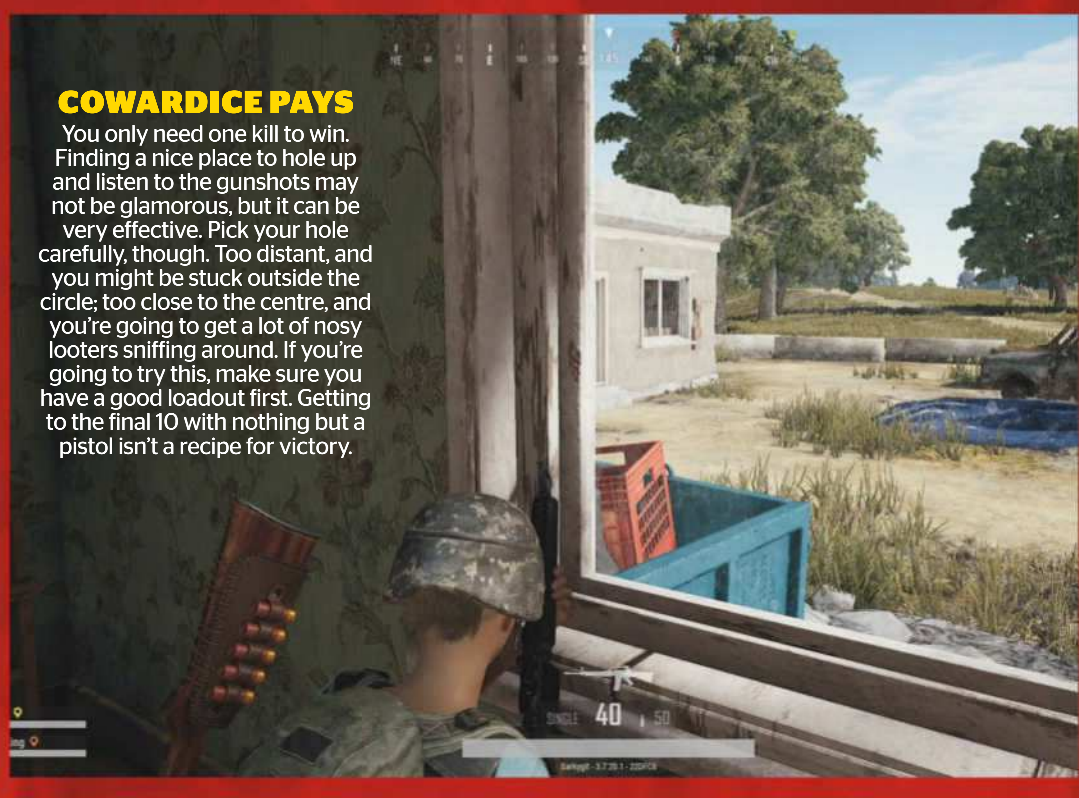
TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Essential equipment includes a backpack, an assault rifle with at least a 2x scope, a good secondary weapon (an SMG or shotgun), and armour. Smoke and frag grenades also come in handy. Melee weapons are largely irrelevant, unless you find a pan. Yep, a pan. It's no better in combat than other melee weapons, but it's bulletproof while sitting on your hip.



TRIGGER DISCIPLINE

You spot an enemy on a hill. You have an assault rifle with an 8x scope. You haven't seen anyone all game, but now it's your chance to get a kill. Think. What if you miss, and get stuck in a sniping match with the circle closing in? What if another player hears your shots? As a rule, if you're not 90% sure you can kill them, and they haven't seen you, don't bother.



COWARDICE PAYS

You only need one kill to win. Finding a nice place to hole up and listen to the gunshots may not be glamorous, but it can be very effective. Pick your hole carefully, though. Too distant, and you might be stuck outside the circle; too close to the centre, and you're going to get a lot of nosy looters sniffing around. If you're going to try this, make sure you have a good loadout first. Getting to the final 10 with nothing but a pistol isn't a recipe for victory.



GUERILLA TACTICS

Airdrops contain the best weapons and equipment in the game, and you'll want those goodies, it's true, but airdrops are even more valuable as an ambush tool. If one lands right next to you, loot it, then camp it out. Opponents will flock from all around, either to loot it themselves or to hunt the people who do. Make sure that you're prepared for them to come sneaking around, and you can rack up some tidy kills.



SILENT BUT DEADLY

The crossbow is notoriously tricky to use, but in the final stages of the game it really comes into its own. When the circle is tiny, the completely silent crossbow can be used to pick off unsuspecting enemies without compromising your position, and at close range the crossbow's drop-off is negated and headshots are much easier. Keep an assault rifle handy as well in case you get spotted.



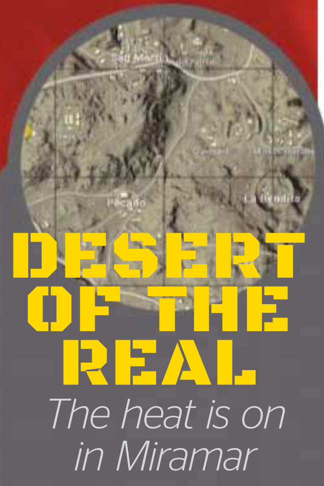
HIT AND RUN

In general, vehicles should be used sparingly. The loud engine noise alerts everyone to your position, and if your tyres are taken out, you're a sitting duck. Having said that, near the end of the game you can rack up kills by driving through bushes, brush, and other hiding places. Once you're done with the vehicular homicide, park somewhere with good cover and get away from the vehicle ASAP.



A REAL BOOSTER

Energy drinks and caffeine pills can make or break you when things are tight. With bandages and healing kits, you can only get to 75% health. Gaining Boost not only heals the remaining 25%, it also increases your run speed, which can mean the difference between life and death when you're stuck outside the circle. These items won't help you if you're dead, so use them early and often.



DESERT OF THE REAL

The heat is on in Miramar

The new desert map, Miramar, is a very different beast from the more verdant and lush Erangel map – try and approach it in the same way, and you'll be in for a quick death. For starters, cover is much less abundant. No forests or haystack-filled fields are to be found here, so staying in the open is a bad idea. The cities and buildings are larger and more complex, so be prepared for intense room-to-room warfare. Pack a good shotgun, make use of the new vaulting mechanic to outwit opponents, and listen carefully for the tell-tale clink of a cooked grenade landing near you.



OVER AND ABOVE

*Blizzard's first attempt at a first-person-shooter, **Overwatch** shows no signs of slowing down*

Blizzard has done what it does best with Overwatch. The Irvine studio has a history of taking existing ideas and polishing them to a mirror shine, from reinventing the MMORPG with World Of Warcraft to bringing card games to the masses with Hearthstone. Combining the maps and classes of Team Fortress 2, and smashing them against DOTA-style abilities, Overwatch manages to be so much more than the sum of its parts.

Overwatch pits two teams against each other in six-on-six skirmishes. Whether pushing payloads through London or holding the centre of a Greek town, teamplay is always top priority. Shooting plays a part, but this isn't a game for lone wolves. At the centre of Overwatch is a web of counter-play and team compositions. With the ability to switch heroes at any time between lives, success in Overwatch is knowing when to switch off your favourite hero to take care of that pesky Hanzo across the map.

All heroes, no zeroes

Despite this initial complexity, Overwatch owes a lot of its success to accessible design. Very few heroes really require pinpoint accuracy. Sharpshooters might get a string of headshots with a decades-honed aim, but genre newcomers can be equally valid by picking up Reinhardt's shield, or using Lucio's healing aura near their team. Usually, having the right heroes for the job matters more than twitchy trigger fingers.

It helps that Overwatch is also relentlessly positive. Killing sprees might land you the Play Of The Game, but it's just as likely to be a well-timed shield boost or resurrection. With every part of a team vital to success, the game takes care to make sure everyone feels rewarded.

Overwatch has grown tremendously since launch. In 2018, there are more ways to play than ever. These days, players can try the base game casually or competitively, pick from a handful of weekly Brawls – wild, one-off modes like We're All Soldiers Now (everyone plays as the grizzled gun-dad Soldier: 76) or Total Mayhem (more ultimates, more health, more madness), and even scroll through an old-school server browser where settings can be altered to ridiculous degrees.

Every couple of months, special events come to Overwatch, bringing a catalogue of themed skins and a special limited-time game mode. In the next few months, we're expecting to see a return of Overwatch Summer Games. Blizzard's take on the Olympics pits players against each other in Lucioball – Rocket League inspired bouts of three-a-side footie, starring our favourite skating DJ.

Whether you're a competitive pro eyeing up a spot in the League, or simply looking for a colourful place to bash things with your mates, there's something here for everybody.



"OVERWATCH IS RELENTLESSLY POSITIVE... THE GAME MAKES SURE EVERYONE FEELS REWARDED"

WATCH YOUR STEP

The world could always use more heroes... are you one of them?



LEARNING THE ROPES

Overwatch might not be up there with League Of Legends in terms of sheer roster size, but 27 characters is still pretty intimidating for a newcomer. Luckily, we're here to help you figure out where to start.

The basic tutorial might help if you've never touched a first-person shooter before, but there's a sizeable gap between being able to point a gun and knowing when to rocket jump into concussion blast across the map. Fortunately, there are options.

An open training arena lets you toy with hero abilities hassle-free. Friendly and opposing robots let you test your strengths, while there's enough room to make the most of mobility. There are options for bot matches, too, as a next step before you face the gaming public.

We found that the best tool for picking up a new character, however, was getting in a few rounds of Mystery Heroes. Fortunately, the Brawl has a permanent slot in Arcade, and we've found its random character selection invaluable for picking up heroes we'd never think to play. Wild, unpredictable team compositions take away some pressure, but the immediacy of being dropped into Doomfist forces you to really think about how to best nail those uppercuts.



TOO SLOW!

Getting into the action quickly can snatch victory from defeat, so it pays to know how best to use your hero's skills. Some of these are more obvious than others – Tracer's naturally centred on zipping about like a cockney Sonic, but learning how to best utilise Lucio's wallride can make him a much slippier target. Some abilities can combine offence and mobility. Junkrat's mine might launch foes skyward, but can send the Aussie soaring across maps in kind, and Pharah's concussive blast is as useful for knocking players off cliffs as it is for giving a little airborne speed boost.

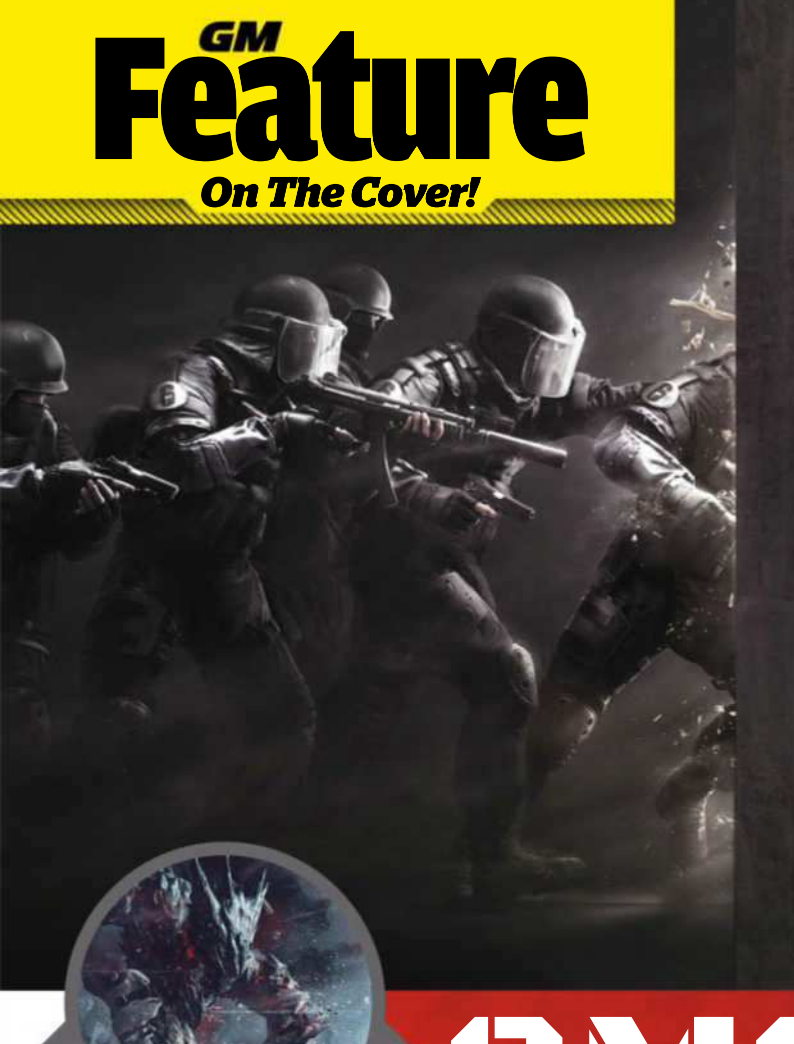


HONOUR & GLORY

Overwatch's newest hero is Brigitte Lindholm – daughter of Torbjorn, goddaughter to Reinhardt, and would-be inventor of flying felines. Toeing the line between Support and Tanking roles, she's certainly a weird one to play, taking influence from both of her father figures.

With flail and shield, Brigitte plays best when stuck in the action – and you'll want to be there with your friends, as each successful hit radiates healing around her. Combined with her deployable temporary armour packs, nobody should be falling with Brigitte at their side. Her personal shield is great for keeping pesky snipers from picking her off, with a bash that's great for cancelling all manner of moves. With a quick cooldown, Shield Bash is also great for getting into brawls fast.

When facing Brigitte, it's useful to remember her shield isn't nearly as strong as Reinhardt's or Orisa's, and will pop quickly when subjected to sustained fire. Her extended Rocket Flail might have more reach than you'd think, but remember that Brigitte's ranged options are limited. Keep a mobile middle distance, then catch her flank, and you'll have absolutely no trouble taking her down.





SMOOTH OPERATOR

How Tom Clancy's ***Rainbow Six Siege*** *went from black sheep to black ops*

The Rainbow Six series has a long and storied history, with many varied iterations. It started as an almost simulation-like experience, before transforming into a more approachable tactical game with Rainbow Six 3. It dropped the ball with the dumbed-down Lockdown, but made a better gamble with the spectacular Vegas. Then came Siege, perhaps the most radical take on the series to date.

With no real single-player content the entire experience is focused on a tight, asymmetric multiplayer mode. A team of defenders are besieged by a team of attackers, each with access to a set of operators who all have differing weapons and gadgets. And all of this happens across levels that are almost fully destructible, meaning the series' traditional tactic of breaching and clearing could now come from any wall or window, ceiling or floor. For a multiplayer game, Siege was both a tight tactical squad game and also an unpredictable sandbox experience, a unique and compelling combination.

Under siege

Yet upon its release it ran into a series of obstacles. This bold new take on the Rainbow Six series was so removed from the series' tradition of strong single-player focus that most fans were left unsure what to do with it. For those who'd never played any Rainbow Six game before, there were so many aspects to learn: operator combinations, environment destruction, level layouts, weapon handling, and so on. A lot for any newcomer to tackle, especially with no single-player campaign to ease them in. Other issues, such as bad connectivity, glitches and unbalanced maps, left many players frustrated.

Yet Ubisoft did not abandon it, but instead got hard at work making the game better. It kept up a steady stream of content, adding new operators that each radically altered the dynamic of the game. Perhaps more vitally, it polished the game to the point of overhauling the graphics to give better performance and the ballistic system to be more reliable. Ubisoft also added many more options for players to purchase the game, meaning new players could dip their toes in the water without paying full price.

Over a year Siege became more accessible, more polished, and an even better version of an already stellar online game. There's nothing quite like it out there, and for fans of slower-paced, tenser and more thoughtful shooters, Rainbow Six Siege is the best there is.

LEFT 6 DEAD

Playing can be infectious…

With the latest major update Ubisoft has introduced a brand-new co-op mode called Outbreak, in which players must battle hordes of infected enemies with a selection of operators tailored to the new scenario. It's a huge change of pace from the core competitive multiplayer but for those who want something different now and then from the game, this can make for a nice (out)break.



NEW RECRUIT

Getting started in Rainbow Six Siege

OBSTACLE COURSE

Do the tutorials! It seems obvious but numerous players take themselves online without doing the missions that run your through the basics of the game. Given how Siege does things its own way, it pays to start with a strong foundation. Plus you get points towards unlocking operators for completing each scenario.



SPECIALIST SUBJECT



Choosing an operator appropriate for each match is important but you don't need to master them all. A small handful you can cycle through will allow you to get comfortable while having someone for each situation. Just be wary of operators such as Caveira who have more specialised roles and take lots of learning.

EXTREME HOME MAKEOVER

As defenders, you'll have to reinforce walls to stop the attackers being able to shoot through or smash their way in. Reinforced walls can still be destroyed by operators such as Thermite so don't think your fortress is impenetrable. Choose your placement wisely; you won't have enough barricades for every surface.



BREACH AND CLEAR



As attackers you'll need operators who can cut their way through reinforced walls, and characters such as Thatcher who can disable enemy traps and gadgets, stopping the defenders from blocking the use of breaching charges and other tools. Don't forget to use rappelling to get above or below the enemy too.

DUCK FOR COVER

Always remember, almost everything is destructible. Attacks can come from any direction and not just breaches; players can shoot through thin walls too. This will take some time, but learning the few things that are indestructible is essential if you want to be able to set up ambushes or find safe cover in a firefight.



NON-REGULATION UNIFORM



Don't forget to customise your characters. Equipping sights and grips will allow you to tailor each weapon to how you prefer to handle them, reducing recoil or enabling you to fight better at range. Plus, skins and outfits will inject them with personality – in case you were worried this was an all-too-serious military game.

VETERANS CLUB

Skills that set you apart from the fresh meat



SOUND IS YOUR ALLY

It's all too easy to overlook just how important audio is to Rainbow Six Siege. Ubisoft has done a stellar job of filling levels with ambient sounds (for example, radios playing or the hum of machinery) to throw you off, as well as making the sound of gunfire and movement extremely detailed. Because of that, a good sound system or decent set of headphones can give you a serious edge over other players. Being able to pinpoint an unsuspecting enemy through a wall or hear someone trying to sneak up on you can make the difference between victory or defeat. On numerous occasions we've watched players get killed because they couldn't hear important audio cues.



LASER TAG

Laser sights are a neglected tool in Siege – though in some ways with good reason. They're visible to your opponents, and can give away your position to attentive players – this has led to many refusing to use them at all, fearful of bringing themselves a whole heap of trouble. Yet careful players can take advantage of the accuracy boost laser sights provide by keeping their secondary equipped in quieter moments or giving special care to where they place their sights. In the end it's your choice, but in a game where a few well-placed rounds are a enough to kill, having the edge in accuracy even for just a few shots can make a huge difference.





CHOOSE YOUR PACKAGE

For all your multiformat needs, subscribe today to the world's most dedicated gaming mag. We have three options to choose from...

PRINT

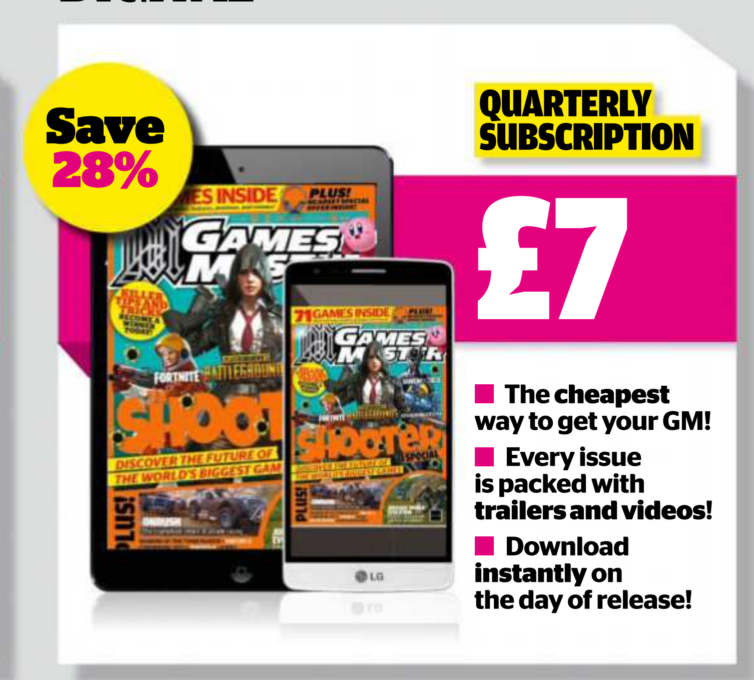
PLUS FREE HEADSET

6 MONTH SUBSCRIPTION

£30

- It costs less than buying it in the shops!
- Delivered to your door every month!
- Never miss an issue!

DIGITAL



Save 28%

QUARTERLY SUBSCRIPTION

£7

- The cheapest way to get your GM!
- Every issue is packed with trailers and videos!
- Download instantly on the day of release!



Save 27%

PRINT & DIGITAL

QUARTERLY SUBSCRIPTION

£19



- The best-value GM package!
- Every print issue delivered to you!
- A digital copy for iOS or Android!
- New trailers and videos each month!

BUY A SIX-MONTH PRINT SUBSCRIPTION AND GET A VENOM NIGHTHAWK HEADSET FOR FREE!

KEY FEATURES

40mm speaker drivers
Superior sound clarity to enhance your gaming experience

Inline volume control unit
Ergonomically designed control for in-game volume

Soft cushioned headband and ear cups
For maximum comfort during gameplay

Adjustable flexible microphone
Fully adjustable microphone for live in-game chat

1.5-metre flat cable
With 3.5mm jack (2.5mm adaptor cable provided for Xbox 360)

UNIVERSAL
Compatible with PS4, PSP, Xbox One (requires adaptor), Xbox 360, PC, Mac, and tablet



GO ONLINE: WWW.MYFAVOURITEMAGAZINES.CO.UK/VENOM OR CALL 0344 848 2852



It's got lots of style but its aesthetics may grate on you. Though we're prepared to forgive it a lot for the joy of watching debris fly in a collision.

"IT'S NOT A WORLD AWAY FROM THE TERRIFIC VEHICULAR BATTLES IN MAD MAX: FURY ROAD"

Format PS4, XO **Publisher** Deep Silver
Developer Codemasters **ETA** 5 June

ONRUSH

An innovative racer that won't Burnout or fade away

Racing games that do something genuinely new are a rare breed. It's a genre that has historically been iterative rather than revolutionary, building on what came before rather than constructing what comes next. So Onrush is quite the trailblazer. In fact, it's not even entirely a racing game. Taking influence from games from Overwatch to Burnout, the end result is a team-based arcade racer where there's no finish line.

How do you know who's won if there's no line to cross, you might ask. Simple: each team is competing through their performance on the track. Pulling off stunts or knocking players off the track secures victory, not winning a lap. It's not just refreshing, it's a hell of a lot of fun.

No kidding

The face of the game might be a little offputting. It has the distinct whiff of a bunch of grown ups trying to be down with the kids, trading in sketchy artwork and obnoxious commentary that one might imagine appeals to a generation raised on YouTube but in reality lacks any convincing authenticity. "It's for posers", as the kids might say.

Yet underneath that painfully "radical!" exterior is a massively entertaining racer



Those canyon walls? As long as you're going fast enough you can drive up them and defy gravity – because of course you can. That's just how physics works.

Death race
Four madcap modes

Override
The basic mode, where Boost is also the currency used to increase your team's score. The fact the other modes have fun modifiers doesn't mean this vanilla option is any less enthralling.



Countdown
Teams start with 30 seconds on the clock and compete to hit checkpoints to keep their time up. First to run out loses. This is the closest Onrush gets to feeling like a traditional racing game.



King of the hill
While it would have been easy to make this an arena-based mode, Onrush instead has a hill that moves around the track. Fighting for control of it at a hundred of miles per hour makes this a real thrill.



Elimination
Each player has three lives, and the first team to run out loses. The most aggressive mode, the emphasis is less on stunts and more on running your foes off the road or crushing them against a wall.



firing on all cylinders. As mentioned, it's team based, with two teams going head-to-head on a variety of tracks. The aim is to build up Boost, which, as you can probably guess, is a speed-boosting resource, by eliminating other players, doing stunts, or even ramming through helpless AI enemies who run around the track. Burning Boost increases your team's score, and so the better you perform, the more precious speed juice you have and the more you can contribute to your team.

80% complete

Of course, as Boost is a resource you need to use to pull off stunts and compete with your opponents, there's no point using it up the instant you get it. You're going to need to find a good balance between keeping up your speed and saving your resources for when they'll have the most when you're in it. It's not a world away from the terrific vehicular battles in the film Mad Max: Fury Road, and it really does crackle with extreme possibility when you're caught up in it.

Using Boost also builds up your Rush meter, which you can use to activate your special ability. Which power you have will depend on your chosen vehicle. Onrush has a variety of vehicle classes to select from, each with their own attributes and powers – for example, there's a motorbike which can create a blast of force when landing from a jump, throwing enemies off course. Then there's a tumbling humvee which can create a series of barriers behind itself to slow opponents down. There's a whole arsenal, and each team is going to have to find a healthy balance or unique

> **"HAS A CHANCE TO BREAK OUT OF THE CONFINES OF ITS GENRE IN THE SAME WAY THAT OVERWATCH ENTERED THE MAINSTREAM"**

effect. It's a dynamic that puts players in a completely different mindset from other racers out there. Good driving is still an essential skill, but now it's about more than just shaving off time round a track.

Dev studio Codemasters has a proven track (ha!) record with racing games, while members of the team creating Onrush have experience on titles such as Motorstorm and Burnout. And you can feel those games' chaotic and destructive nature coursing through Onrush. Everything is centred around what the developer calls Stampede, which is the centre of the action rolling across the map. It's here that dozens of vehicles clash, and if you die or fall behind, the game will drop you right back into it. The aim is to keep players in the thick of the action and avoid any moments that would make you feel removed from what's going on. It's impressive to see as well; there's a lot going on on screen at any one time and it's absolute mayhem combination of vehicles to prevail. Seeing these myriad abilities interact out on the track, combining with teammates or countering enemies, makes it clear just how vital good team work is to the core of the game. Think of Onrush as being a racer in the mould of a MOBA or a hero shooter, and you'll be in the right frame of mind for how to approach it all.

Easy rider
The driving itself is easy to pick up and play, making this a super-accessible racer, though veteran genre fans might feel it's not demanding or precise enough. There's depth enough to the driving, with you having to use the environment to send your vehicle into mid-air spins or somersaults, and the weather will determine just how your vehicle handles. Yet it's geared far more towards being simple to get to grips with rather than an all-engrossing challenge to master. This is racing made for



The thick of the action isn't just where you want to be, it's where the game will make every effort to put you. Die and you'll respawn right back at the heart of the race.



There are groups of weak AI vehicles going round the track, and you can hit them for extra boost. Unlike players, they're easy to take down.

Working with your teammates is crucial if you're to eliminate troublesome players – it's unlikely that you'll be able to manage it on your own.

This blue blur means the vehicle's in Rush mode, where it becomes indestructible and its special ability kicks in. Eat your heart out, Sonic.

everyone, which will, ironically, probably turn some players off.

That accessibility does really make Onrush an exciting prospect, though, because it means there's the chance for this to break out of the confines of its genre in the same way that Overwatch entered the mainstream. It doesn't have that game's pure focus, but it's every bit as fun and novel. This is a game composed of moments; you'll have fun recounting the way a well-timed ability drained the enemy team's Boost, thrusting you back into the lead, or the occasion when your team worked together to take down a powerful enemy player. It's not about performance or stats, but rather just being caught up in the moment. After years of most racers aiming to be more simulative and realistic, a game that throws all that out in favour of something that embraces its nature as a videogame feels surprisingly fresh and exciting.

With the recent Burnout Paradise Remaster re-igniting players' passions for racing games that embrace fun over simulation, Onrush might prove to be just the remedy for anyone tired of detailed, demanding sims. Whether its exciting and approachable gameplay can be well conveyed despite its shallow and sometimes cringeworthy aesthetics will determine its success. It certainly works for us, at least – we're already craving the next rush. ■ ***Sam Greer***

GM Instant Reaction

+ Fun and accessible, while bringing something unique to the genre. Could this be a breakout hit for racing games?

– The style and voiceover commentary are a bit forced, and sometimes it all feels a bit "How do you do, fellow kids?"

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 **4** 5

A whole new approach to driving games – and it's a beast.



There's a whole variety of vehicles to choose from, including dirt bikes and dune buggies, and they all have unique special abilities. Compose your team carefully.



Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Frontier Developments **Developer** Frontier Developments **ETA** 12 June

JURASSIC WORLD EVOLUTION



Welcome... to Jurassic Par... World. Jurassic World. Even though it's a park

There's nothing we could think of that could go wrong with building a theme park where the central attractions are giant prehistoric creatures reanimated via bleeding-edge (and questionably ethical) science, which are then dumped on an island with rickety fences around their enclosures. Nothing. At. All.

Of course, in practice this means even though we are housing some of the safest creatures in all of Jurassic World Evolution (a bunch of early game herbivores which haven't even had their DNA tinkered with to make them faster or more aggressive), one of them blows up over her lack of ability to socialise and goes on a rampage. Remember: even easy dinosaurs are difficult dinosaurs.

Lady Dino-mate

The problem is easily solved – clone her a friend, meaning no future flare-ups – but it leads us to realise what sort of exercise in plate-spinning Frontier will be engaging players in when Evolution releases. Managing a park, like in the studio's ace Planet Coaster, is one thing. Doing it while stopping a T-Rex on a 'munch the families' jaunt? That ratchets things up, without even bringing in the storms that take out power sub-stations, or Dennis Nedry-like sabotage. It's plate-spinning, but the plates have teeth and weigh thousands of kilograms.

That either sounds great to you (well done, you're on the same page as us) or bewildering and difficult. If it is the latter,

"MANAGING A PARK IS LIKE PLATE-SPINNING, BUT THE PLATES HAVE TEETH AND WEIGH THOUSANDS OF KILOGRAMS"



Dinosaurs can communicate with one another, though it's doubtful these two clever girls are hatching a plan per se.





We thought tanks were invented in the 20th century. Turned out they'd evolved millions of years prior.



rest assured Jurassic World Evolution isn't just a chaos simulator, though there is an aspect of that. It can be a sedate trip into the world of business simulation, ancient DNA research, and park planning. And it's all been made by a studio that has priors when it comes to park management, so you're in good hands.

Solid Goldblum

Of course, there's the license to talk about too. Jurassic World (and Park) is all over Evolution, from your branding and in-game vehicles, to the return of certain characters from the films. Ian Malcolm even plays a central role, with Jeff Goldblum reprising his character in order to offer you guidance and a sort of moral compass as you progress. After all, playing god isn't the most ethical of pursuits, and it always pays to question the motives of those looking to put profit before all else. First they're watering down the cola, then they're splicing alligator into your velociraptors.

Jurassic World Evolution has its claws dug deep into us. It's an intoxicating mix of park management sim, dinosaurs, and the chance to fix a cascading wave of Everything Going Very Wrong. There's a small chance it could be a bit rushed to meet the release date of the new Jurassic World movie, but we're hopeful that this is exactly what we want: a park full of dinosaurs we can edit the gene sequence of, clone as we please, then tranquilise on a whim. Wait, that doesn't sound very nice on paper ■ ***Ian Dransfield***

GM Instant Reaction

+ Combines Frontier's genuine park sim expertise with one of the best movie licenses in the world, and does it very well.

− We haven't yet been able to actively 'Dennis Nedry' the joint. We live in hope of disaster scenarios to work through.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

This is the Jurassic Park game you've been waiting for.

Build me up

Sorting your saurian shopping list

Exciting carnivores



The sole reason anybody would want to clone a giant creature from the dawn of time. Big, angry, hungry, and still angry, they'll put a spring in anyone's step (when they escape).

Functional buildings



You shouldn't neglect park facilities – you need power and staff, and the people visiting need drinks and merchandise. They also need to be charged through the nose for everything.

Boring herbivores



Back on the dino-pals, you'll also want to clone some grass-munchers for… We're not entirely sure. Yes, some were the biggest creatures ever to have existed on land, but velociraptors are much more thrilling.

A monorail



How do people get to the park? Using the most futuristic of all transport methods. Brilliantly, you can modify and upgrade your monorail capacity, the track length and so on – doing all you can to make more money.





Mixing herbivores in one enclosure rarely leads to aggression – though fights can break out. When you throw a carnivore in there, though…



The game's world is a feast for the eyes, full of weird creatures and other intriguing details.

GM MOST WANTED

Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Curve Digital **Developer** Solar Sail **ETA** Winter

SMOKE AND SACRIFICE

This survival RPG is one tough mother



As we've previously discussed here in GamesMaster, mums are all too absent from videogames. How wonderful, then, of developer Solar Sails Games to answer our prayers and give us this maternal survival RPG.

Smoke And Sacrifice is the story of Sachi, who lives in a village surrounded on all sides by deadly, frozen wastes. The village is kept lush and prosperous by the Sun Tree, a towering mechanical light that radiates warmth. There is a catch, though. (Isn't there always?) To keep the Sun Tree running and the village safe, the villagers must regularly sacrifice a child to the great machine in a ritual conducted by a ruling religious class. The game begins on the fateful day when Sachi must give up her child, something she agrees to with great reluctance and torment, though her village considers it a great privilege.

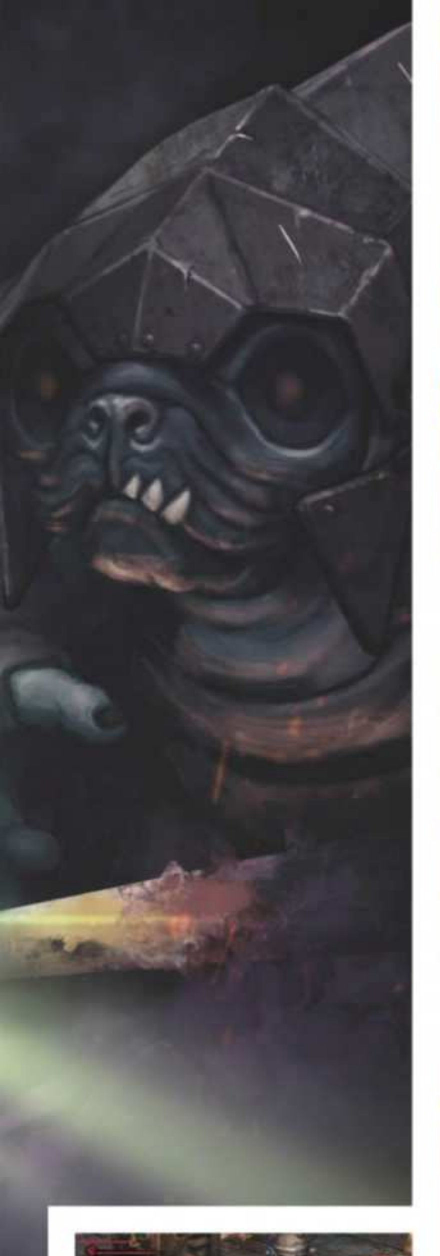
We then return to Sachi years later, now clearly distressed and guilty over what she did. She's given a ray of hope when a stranger reveals that her son may actually still be alive. It's at this point that the Sun Tree fails and the village falls under attack from the monsters of the surrounding wastes. From here Sachi is plunged into the world below the village, left to fend for herself in a dangerous environment, her only aid coming from the strange ghostly people who dwell there. She's now on a quest to find out the truth behind the Sun Tree, and to find her son.

60% complete

For a sprawling survival action-RPG it might seem odd that we've spent so much time on the story, but that strong narrative backbone sets it apart from its many genre peers. Where other games revel in missionless sandboxes, Smoke And Sacrifice is structured and focused. There's little dialogue, but what's there evokes Sachi's inner world. Her turmoil is rendered very real in a matter of minutes and you'll care about her cause, providing a driving motivation not usually seen in games like this.

Mum's the world

This isn't to say Smoke And Sacrifice doesn't offer plenty of freedom. The open world in which your journey takes places is yours to tackle as you like. It's dense with plants and creatures, all of which have a role to play in the dynamic ecosystem. Plants awaken at night to nab fireflies to snack on, and roaming jellyfish creatures drop different organs when slain during the day (collecting organs to survive is far from the worst you'll have to do, trust us). Luring monsters into proximity with each other can be a useful trick to keep yourself alive, with their





You'll start out wearing the humble rags of your village but eventually you'll be donning fur coats and even power armour. The idea that we're going to need a combat exoskeleton to survive later monsters is a little unnerving, to be honest.



Tricking creatures into battling each other can have explosive consequences. Still, it saves us a fight.





The winter wasteland is where the difficulty really cranks up a notch, and Sachi will need to call on all her crafting skills.

abilities and behaviours becoming an extension of the game's combat. You can nab those fireflies for light sources, shake trees down for fruit, and kill animals for various parts.

The great trick of Smoke And Sacrifice is the way every ingredient in the game world has a variety of uses. Fireflies, for example, may produce light but they also fuel your magical pendant, which gives you the ability to summon a shield. You'll have to choose which is more important to you. These choices make the game's resource management far more engaging than simply ensuring you have enough of each thing. You have to decide what you particularly want to do, and prioritise chasing specific weapons or tools over others. It gives a surprising weight to your decisions, and makes the experience feel more like you're following your own route than simply chasing a predetermined path through upgrades, or just hoarding every object in sight.

The game's comparatively detailed combat helps too. Bayonetta this ain't, but it's certainly a cut above your average survival game brawls, with a nice blend of dodging and defending, and weapons that all have their own sets of combos and benefits. Just because the bone machete is harder to build than the starting club doesn't make it automatically better – just different. Each weapon has its strength, whether that be in making quicker attacks or wide sweeping swings, or having greater reach. Nothing easily becomes obsolete.

"ITS STRANGE, BEAUTIFUL WORLD IS INSTANTLY ENGAGING – WE CAN'T HELP BUT WANT TO EXPLORE AND LEARN ITS QUIRKS"

Zero son game

Our hands-on leaves us impressed. Its strange, beautiful world is instantly engaging – we can't help but want to explore and learn its quirks. Blend that with some well-considered RPG and survival mechanics, and a story that has some real emotional heft, and the end result is seriously promising. We predict this'll be a surprise hit when it launches later this year.

It's one for fans of survival games, certainly, but also for those who want interesting worlds and characters. We're not sure what the developer sacrificed to get its hands on this magic formula but the end result is a game that feels very special indeed. ■ ***Sam Greer***

GM Instant Reaction

+ A strong and unique story that already has its hooks in us – from the very start, Sachi isn't your usual protagonist.

+ A fascinating sandbox world with loads of strange creatures to interact with. And kill for their organs, natch.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

A survival game with a proper story? Yes please.

While the in-game visuals aren't quite this well composed they're not far away either. Extremely lush colours abound.

Format PC **Developer** Frostkeep Studios
Publisher Frostkeep Studios **ETA** Summer

REND

The Diablo's in the details

The survival game genre has ballooned to gargantuan proportions over the past few years – Terraria, Ark: Survival Evolved, and Don't Starve are just three excellent examples. Standing out in that crowd is going to take something truly special, but Rend might just have what it takes emerge as the fittest new contender.

This fantasy titles comes from a team of ex-Blizzard developers, and while it's squarely constructed on the standard 'gather supplies and craft bases' aspect of the genre, the layers they've built on top show a lot of promise. For one thing, it looks gorgeous. The survival genre is really better known for its ugly and dreary visuals but Rend's vibrantly colourful and stylish world really leaves an impression. It's a space we immediately want to jump into and explore – no matter how hostile it may turn out to be. It's a far cry from the drab locales found in many of its peers.

Warcrafting

But most importantly, the staff at Frostkeep Studios are bringing their RPG and MMO expertise to the genre, adding several new twists to the action. You'll be aligning yourself with one of three factions in the game, meaning your efforts are part of a larger whole – for example, you'll be helping construct a faction base as opposed to just building your own little hut in the wilderness. The competitive element should add a bit of pressure to the survival premise as not only do you have to keep yourself alive and flourishing, you're racing against time to stop your enemies from succeeding too. There are victory conditions, and getting there first comes with great rewards.

It also seems like you're persistently connected with players outside your specific session, with footage we've seen showing ghostly blue figures that represent other would-be survivalists out there online. The idea that you're all working as a community towards these larger goals certainly sets Rend apart. All of which goes hand in hand with actual quests, skill trees, and huge battles that look pretty spectacular. (Survival Destiny, anyone?) Plus you can ride a giant wolf into battle, which just rules.

It's still early days, but there's a lot of promise and plenty of talent behind the scenes. Bringing something new to survival games is tough, but Frostkeep Studios really is trying something a little different – and hopefully adding a touch magic to the genre. ■ ***Sam Greer***

35% complete

GM Instant Reaction

+ While the RPG mechanics promise a huge and deep game, it's really the lovely visuals that set this apart.

– Survival is a crowded genre – Rend really has its work cut out if it wants to make its own distinctive mark.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 **3** 4 5

A survival fantasy hybrid that gets some Warcraft in your Rust.





When the game wants to provide nasty areas it seems more than capable of dishing up something sinister, such as these menacing crab-creatures.

Format PC, Mobile **Publisher** EightyEightGames
Developer EightyEightGames **ETA** Summer

PHOTOGRAPHS

A story-driven puzzle game – absolutely no shooting required

Consisting of five interconnected stories, Photographs looks like a nice pleasant game, if you go by its bright palette and the warm, comforting narration for its first story. But oh, how appearances deceive, as its initially simple puzzles get trickier and tragedy is just around the corner.

We get to play through the game's shortest chapter, about a jolly, Santa-bearded alchemist and his granddaughter. As you might expect from the game's title, the story is seen through a camera viewfinder. In this case, the focus is on the alchemist's house. Holding the button to zoom in on the pixel art environments, you'll receive a clue on what to focus on, which will trigger a 5x5 grid puzzle. Solve it and a picture will flash up to continue the story.

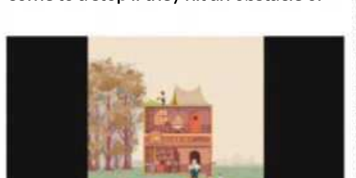
Each story has different sets of puzzles. Here it's a case of navigating the alchemist and the granddaughter to their respective silhouetted exits, though they also move at the same time and will only come to a stop if they hit an obstacle or run into each other. It's simple and intuitive, which then allows for gradual shifts and subversions as new obstacles and mechanics ramp up the challenge, in some cases trapping your characters altogether. Fortunately, you can adjust the slider beneath the photo to rewind your actions.

Developing a habit

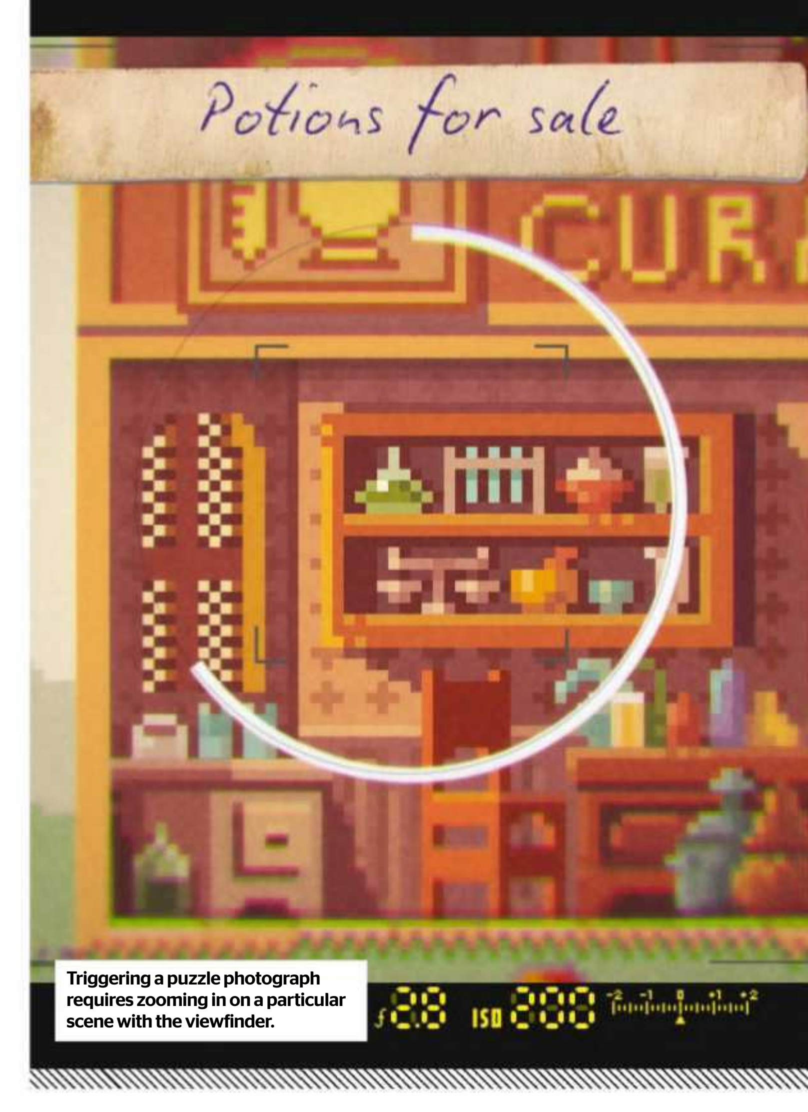
Unlike most narrative-based games, which have had a habit of falling into a walking sim formula of walking to one point to trigger dialogue, this feels reminiscent of What Remains Of Edith Finch, which also conveyed its story vignettes through creative mechanics. It remains to be seen what the other stories' 5x5 grid puzzles will ask us to do, or whether each one uses wildly different mechanics altogether.

75% complete

Presentation is fantastic, with pixel art by Octavi Navarro (Thimbleweed Park) that still looks great in close-ups, plus a dreamlike melancholy score by Ben Prunty (FTL, Into The Breach). We're keen to see what the other stories will be like and, without trying to spoil anything, whether their tragic turns will be as unexpectedly shocking as this first taster. ■ *Alan Wen*







Triggering a puzzle photograph requires zooming in on a particular scene with the viewfinder.



+ Wonderful pixel art and a suitably melancholy score. The photograph motif is cleverly implemented, too.

– It remains to be seen how substantial the other chapters are, and how different their puzzles are to solve.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 **3** 4 5

Has the potential to tax your head and break your heart.



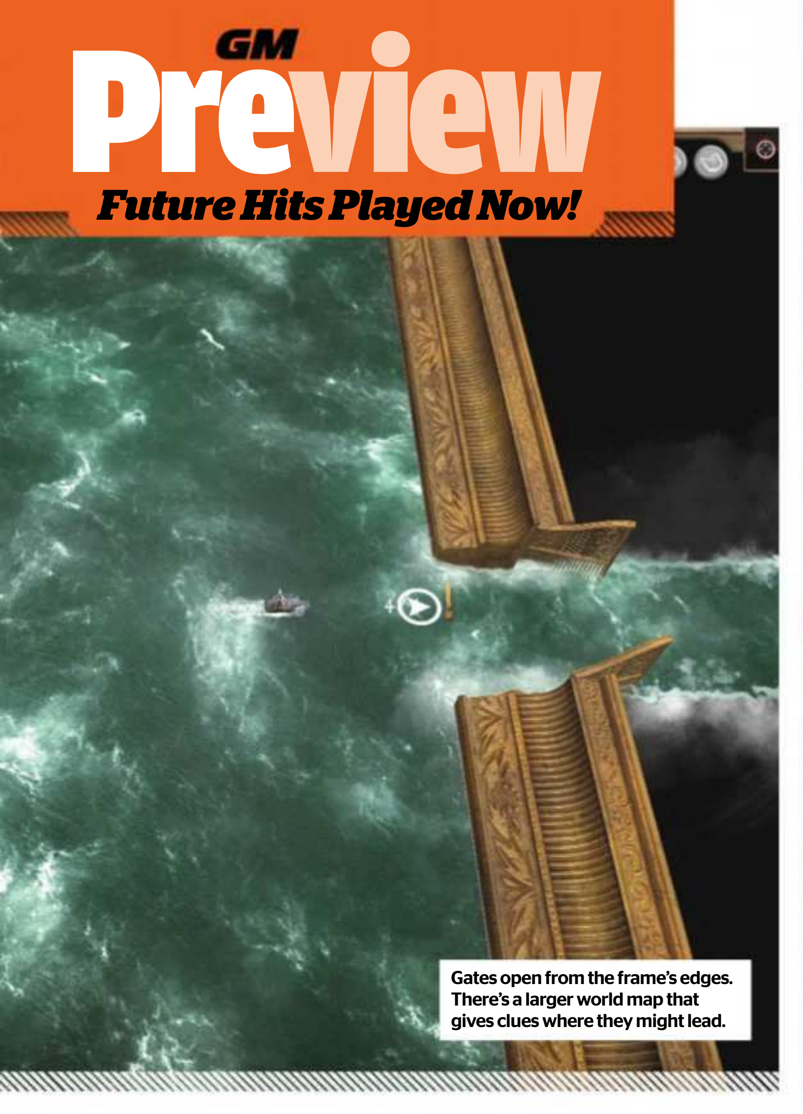




The way the Alchemist's house evolves feels reminiscent of What Remains Of Edith Finch – and it's only one of five interlinked stories.



Narrative elements work their way into the puzzles. These innocent-looking flowers are actually dangerous, so we'll keep the Alchemist and his granddaughter away.



Gates open from the frame's edges. There's a larger world map that gives clues where they might lead.



When the kraken has you in its slimy, suckery tentacles, you assign your crew to hack at them until it lets go. This beastie's not squidding about...



Not content with giant squid, the cult sends fish-man mutants after you too.





GM Instant Reaction

+ Giant sea monsters, crazed cultists, and the fresh sea air in your nostrils. It's already looking pretty polished.

– Events that lose you a crew member without a chance to save them can make navigation a frustrating experience.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Cannon-assisted shipwrecking around every watery corner.





Format PC **Publisher** Fireblade Software
Developer Fireblade Software **ETA** Spring 2019

ABANDON SHIP

We've acsquidentally angered the kraken. Run away!

Being pursued by a kraken-worshipping cult wasn't how we imagined going back to sea, but it's an excuse as good as any to splice the mainbrace, load up the cannon, and get properly stuck into the grog. We have stories to tell that would turn a landlubber's hair giant-whale-white from fear.

It seems the cultists might be onto something, too, as it isn't long into Abandon Ship before you're fighting off the kraken itself, a ship-sized tentacled beast that approaches from underneath, holding your precious frigate in its gelatinous hug until it can be driven far enough away for you to escape.



Ocean views

The whole thing is played from a bird's eye perspective, on a series of interconnected maps that are framed as oil paintings – literally so; a gilt frame runs down all four sides, with gates you can pass through to access new areas. Encounter an enemy ship, or the kraken, and you're thrown into a closer combat view, where you assign your crew to jobs such as firing cannon, repairing damage, or hacking tentacles, and pick out targets for your gunners.

Zoom right out and you can see the whole map, including everything you've discovered on your voyage so far, but to move you have to zoom into a tactical view showing just your ship's visual range. To open a gate in the frame and progress you must complete a number of tasks, from combat to rescue missions, patching yourself up in handy ports you find along the way.

It's a beguiling premise for a game that feels like a mix of FTL and Sid Meier's Pirates!, and as the game is currently in Steam Early Access, there should be more tales of tricorn hats and tentacles to come. ■ *Ian Evenden*



Events you've discovered appear on the wider map. You need to complete a set number before gates to another map will open.



Format Switch, PS4 **Pub** Aksys Games **Dev** Aksys Games **ETA** Summer

LITTLE DRAGONS CAFÉ

Bet you thought you'd never come across a game that boasted dragon husbandry as a feature, did you? Well, you thought wrong! From Yasuhiro Wada, best known for Harvest Moon, it's that familiar story of a twin brother and sister managing a café under their mum's watchful eye until she falls into a deep sleep, and raising a dragon is the only way to save her. Overly familiar, right? Run the café, learn new recipes, and nurture a fire-breathing reptile in this fascinating-sounding title. Flame-grilled dishes a speciality, perhaps? ■ *LK*



Format Mobile **Pub** Gallium **Dev** Gallium **ETA** Winter

PROXI

If you're one of our younger readers you may not recognise the name Will Wright, but you'll certainly recognise at least one of the series he helped create. As the designer behind titles such as The Sims and SimCity, when he makes a new game, we all sit up and take notice. He describes his new project as "a game of self discovery," which will uncover "the hidden you," and "it can learn about you", none of which sounds creepy in the slightest. He's currently looking for an artist via a contest in partnership with Unity; could it be you? ■ *LK*



Format Switch, PS4, PC **Pub** Spike Chunsoft **Dev** Q-Games **ETA** 25 May

PIXELJUNK MONSTERS 2

The PixelJunk series, which began with Racers back in 2007, continues to pump out a wide variety of games. This tower defence title sees the return of Tikiman, defending himself and his Chibis from the monster horde. Now with full 3D graphics, it looks better than ever with new worlds to explore, towers to raise, and items to use. You'll be able to change the perspective from top-down to an up-close-and-personal camera and, excitingly, there's now local and online play for up to four players. ■ *LK*



Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Square Enix **Dev** Eidos/Crystal **ETA** 14 September

SHADOW OF THE TOMB RAIDER

With a solid release date already nailed down (wonder how long that'll last?), more details of Ms Croft's next adventure are waiting for you around the corner, to be revealed on 27 April, just a week after the glorious mag you hold in your beautiful hands hits shelves. Until then, footage we've seen so far suggests a South American adventure, complete with verdant jungles and a trio of huge Mayan temples – plus a solar eclipse. We'll have more for you as soon as we've raided it from the devs. ■ *LK*



Format Switch **Pub** Nintendo **Dev** Nintendo **ETA** Winter

SUPER SMASH BROS

Switch hitters

Nintendo has finally confirmed that it's working on the Switch game its community has been crying out for ever since the console was announced. No, not Animal Crossing, the *other* one. A new instalment in the series that shouldn't work yet does beautifully, where Ninty characters kick seven shades of 1ups out of one another. That one.

The new footage starts out with Splatoon's Inklings. Lots of potential there; it'll be interesting to see how the ink guns and squid transformation are incorporated without being over- or under-powered. Mario and Link are also glimpsed, although no other characters are confirmed just yet. Surely Pikachu will make a return? Who can resist pummelling his face? Four-player battles both local and online are surely a given, and hopefully Wii U's eight-player Smash mode will see a return. Plenty to look forward to later this year. ■ *LK*





The developer is yet to release any in-game footage – only this now five-year-old CG trailer.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** CD Projekt Red **Developer** CD Projekt Red **ETA** Summer 2020

CYBERPUNK 2077

These Pole results are encouraging



To say people are looking forward to this is an understatement. When the official Twitter account, after over four years of inactivity, simply posted "*beep*", it earned well over 19,000 retweets and almost 54,000 likes. Now there's been a financial results conference and – come back! We've got new game information.

If you missed the original webcast, you missed thrilling talk of trade receivables, prepaid expenses, expenditures… and some snippets of info on CD Projekt Red's next game. Company president Adam Kiciński, speaking in his native Polish, made it very clear that Cyberpunk 2077 won't suffer from microtransactions. "[There won't be] any micropayments whatsoever, […] a single-player game purchased for a one-off fee."

Indeed, talk of the game centred on it being a single-player experience. Although multiplayer was mentioned when the game was first announced five(!) years ago, Kiciński said in March's financial conference that the new project is "a huge story-driven roleplaying game for a single player as was the case with The Witcher 3", although he refused to completely rule out online functionality.

Although he said it was too early to confirm when a substantial announcement would arrive, Kiciński did seem to assert that Cyberpunk 2077 will be at E3, with a pre-show announcement just before. It's not dignified to drool, but we can't help ourselves. ■ ***Luke Kemp***

GM Instant Reaction
THRILL-O-METER 1 2 3 4 5
We're feeling lucky, Cyberpunk.



PS4 Pro
ONLY ON P
18
www.pegi.info
4K
HDR

One of many picturesque views, this is taken from near the town hall at Lugano in the south.

Who is...

STAVE STUDIOS

A small, London-based team of four (Failbetter Games' Samuel Partridge and Cash DeCuir, McCann Central's Joshua Callaghan, and VR and iOS freelancer Matt Arneil) Stave Studios was founded with the aim of making narrative-led games that play to the strengths of their platform.

Format PC, Mobile **Developer** Stave Studios **ETA** Winter 2018 **Web** bit.ly/gmota

#1 OVER THE ALPS

Oh, what a le Carré-on


Inkle's brilliant mobile adventure 80 Days meets Wes Anderson's The Grand Budapest Hotel? With a generous dose of WWII espionage, some sumptuous art, and words from one of the writers behind the excellent Fallen London? Over The Alps, the debut from London-based indie studio Stave Studios, has the kind of pitch that should have anyone with more than a scintilla of good taste giddy with anticipation.

While it's not going to shy away from the dark side of war, Stave is hoping to capture some of the romance and excitement of playing a spy. Which is probably quite a challenge when you're holed up in a small co-working space in Dalston, from where the studio's Samuel Partridge is speaking to GM. "You know Loading Bar in London? Lots of us indies come here during the week to work while it's closed, so I'm currently hiding by the Street Fighter machine, which basically counts as my office now," he says. "Ryu is currently kicking the ever-loving sunshine out of someone in the background, but at least I know how to turn the sound off."

He's not complaining, he says, though it's certainly a far cry from Over The Alps' stylish Swiss settings. Artist Joshua Callaghan has illustrated the locations in the style of vintage travel posters, making for a visually striking journey. "The player will tap and click to explore locations – they might get hints to, say, go to a hotel and find some leads there. Then, when they find the right combination of things to tap on, a postcard will pop up and then it's like the text adventure style from 80 Days," Partridge explains. "We are less text-heavy than 80 Days and Fallen London, which I worked on for nearly three years – not that we don't like that, but we recognise that we've got such a good art style, and we can do a lot more with it." The game will balance the player's time between the two styles, with Stave aiming for a rough 50/50 split.

The text, he says, should be "sharp, snappy, period-specific and flavourful". To which end, he's recruited Failbetter

> "YOU'LL BE PURSUED BY A GERMAN AGENT WHO FOLLOWS YOU ACROSS THE MAP"



The stamp-and-postcard interface makes Over the Alps' interactions more tactile and memorable. Choose the stamp that matches the approach you want to take.



Better pack your winter woollies: it can get a bit chilly in the mountains. We're packing our skis too, in the hope of a classic spies-on-skis chase.



The story begins with you finding a box of long-forgotten items from 1939 in your grandfather's attic – and these help you uncover his heroic adventure.

Games scribe Cash DeCuir, formerly lead writer for Fallen London, and now a core part of the Stave team. And it's here that the Wes Anderson part of the equation comes in. "Originally, we had this idea for this very grand, almost romantic style of writing," Partridge says. "But Cash is such a wizard, he turned around and said, 'No, we can make this about exciting, colourful characters'. Anderson's films, in my opinion, are made by the characters."

The aim is to capture a similar blend of humour and pathos, and the studio has looked to other films for examples, with The Life And Death Of Colonel Blimp another key reference point. "It's a great example of what we're going for," Partridge continues, "You have this enormous comedy character – and when you look back at the '30s, it's full of these exciting personalities, especially in the world of espionage. But there's sometimes a sad story behind them, buried just beneath the surface."

There's humour and sadness, then, but also plenty of tension and thrills. Throughout your journey, you'll be pursued by The Spycatcher, a German agent who follows you across the map. She'll close in should you make the wrong choices, but with the right ones she'll lose your trail. In the latter case, it might even come down to something as simple as looking the right way when crossing the road – "Which is something British spies often fail to do, hilariously," Partridge laughs.

Over The Alps will also differ from classic text adventures in one specific way: your list of choices in any scenario will be represented not with text but with postage stamps, a way of giving the decision-making process a little more period-specific character. "Each choice is marked by the type of choice that it is," Partridge elaborates, "Whether you're practising charity, patience or charm, or you're being wilful. And as you go through the game you'll find that more choices become available to you." To be clear, he says, the game doesn't have a philately aspect to it. "I'm trying not to do a Peter Molyneux here," he grins, "So 'collecting' isn't the right word for it. Rather than just choosing from a list, the player will basically be flicking through a book of stamps to make their decisions."

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS! LIKE THIS? TRY THIS! LIKE THIS? TRY THIS! LIKE THIS? TRY THIS!

Try this!

With Over The Alps boasting two Failbetter alumni, what better time to recommend the studio's narrative-driven roguelike Sunless Sea? bit.ly/gmsunless

The secret's out

Partridge and his colleagues have been working part-time on the game for just over a year now, and they're just about ready for the final push: Over The Alps is in the alpha stage, and by the time you read this, should be in good enough shape to take to events. "The plan now is to spend all of March getting the first act of the game nailed, and that will form the backbone of the alpha," Partridge says. "Then we'll be publicly showing it for the first time, getting more people playing it and listening to feedback." Hopefully, he says, that will include potential publishers – and on this evidence, Stave certainly shouldn't be short of takers. ■



The 60 Second Pitch

Stepping back in time with **Samuel Partridge**

"The beginning of the game is set in modern times – you go into your attic and discover a shoebox full of postcards written in invisible ink. This reveals that your grandfather was a spy in World War II. As you're reading back through these postcards, you're reliving their memories of a fateful mission that occurred back in 1939 in Switzerland, on the brink of war. I grew up listening to stories about the war from my grandparents, and it's a personal interest of mine to keep history alive, but also to explore the espionage of the period.

We want to capture that feeling of adventure in Over The Alps, but it's not going to be a wholly unserious game. We are going to have to deal with the Nazis, and some reasonably harsh facts about Switzerland at the time too. We were inspired to make this after playing 80 Days and watching classic war and espionage films such as The Great Escape, The 39 Steps, and The Third Man. If we can make something that even comes close to those, then we'll be very happy."

Format PC **Developer** Moshing Cat Studio **ETA** 2019 **Web** bit.ly/gmsquare

#2 SQUAREWAVE MAKER

Music maker puts a synth in your step



The concept of 'sandbox rhythm action' suggested by Squarewave Maker's tagline is an odd one. At first glance this is more like Super Mario Maker spliced with a music creation tool – in other words, a side-scroller where a character runs, dashes, and bounces along to the beat, gaining points for hitting their cues.

"We want to build a bridge between 'maker' games and electronic music," Moshing Cat Studio's Olivier Veneri tells us, explaining that the game has been in development since July 2016. It's taken longer than expected thanks to his team's efforts to build a custom game engine that reduces latency to a minimum, tackling a key problem with many modern TVs (which recently made the remake of PaRappa The Rapper almost unplayable).

"The latency is so low, it's below video frame rates – under 10 milliseconds," Veneri explains. It should, he says, allow for a greater degree of accuracy, with a scoring system based on how precise your timing is. You'll use three buttons to control your blocky avatar, with a dash, a drop, and a jump letting you hit every mark, whether it's on the ground or floating above it. As a result, playing the game should feel a little like playing some kind of electronic instrument.

"For the gameplay, we wanted to have real-time instruments," Veneri adds. "Everything you hear is generated real-time – it's not pre-recorded." You'll be able to tweak the sounds, changing the presets or the synthesiser – you can even make everything sound like an

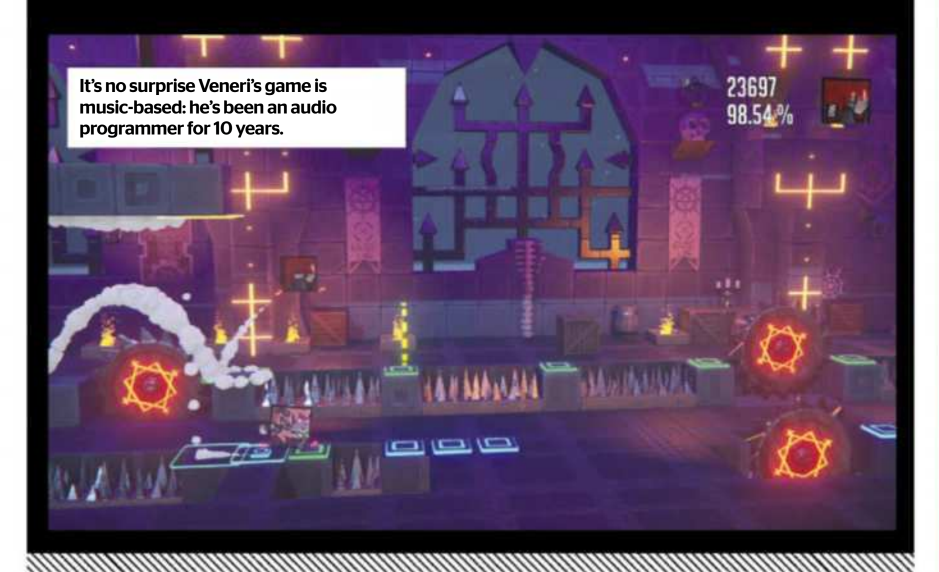


Squarewave Maker's entertainingly blocky characters were inspired by games like Minecraft, Veneri says.

8-bit game. "It's an easy way to jump onto the composition part of the game," he says.

And this is Squarewave Maker's real hook: a flexible music creation tool that lets you build a soundtrack and a stage design at once. Veneri realises not everyone will be adept with the musical tools. "That's still an open question, how we'll reward players – is it possible to do some kind of quest system to help them learn all the features of the sequencer and the synthesiser? That's something that we're working on."

In the meantime, Moshing Cat is taking inspiration from Nintendo's creative toolkit. "Mario Maker's sharing mechanics, where you can evaluate the difficulty of the shared level – that was inspiring," Veneri nods, suggesting his team have already found a way to ease novice musicians into the creative side of the game. The goal, he says, is to enter Early Access next year, where Squarewave Maker should evolve – perhaps supporting MIDI instruments in future updates. You might be building linear stages, but the creative side really is a musical sandbox. Perhaps that tagline isn't misleading after all. ■



It's no surprise Veneri's game is music-based: he's been an audio programmer for 10 years.

Small... But Perfectly Formed

The five best rhythm-based indies to get your toes tapping



#1 CRYPT OF THE NECRODANCER

A roguelike where your actions are boosted by timing them to the beat, Brace Yourself Games' dungeon-crawler turns combat into an elaborate dance-off. Thanks to Danny Baranowsky's sublime soundtrack, learning the steps to outmanoeuvre enemies is a genuine pleasure.



#2 AAERO

Calling Mad Fellows Games' debut 'a dubstep Rez' is as likely to discourage as many as it excites. But this rhythmic shooter is a delight. As you dodge crushers and slamming gates, you'll speed down a glowing track that oscillates like a cardiogram, making each stage an exhilarating ride.



#3 ONE FINGER DEATH PUNCH

Good fight choreography should feel like a dance routine. One Finger Death Punch breaks it down to the basics, as enemies move in from both sides and you jab buttons to attack them. It gets more exciting as it grows more complex, with a challenge that adapts to your skill level.



#4 AUDIOSURF

A puzzler, a racer, and a rhythm-action game all in one, this clever hybrid tasks you with collecting and then matching coloured blocks as you speed along a multi-lane motorway. It analyses and adapts your own music to create bespoke tracks, for a challenge as long and diverse as your music collection.



#5 OSU!

Based on DS masterpiece Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan, this freeware game uses the same hit circles, sliders and spinners as you click or tap along to imported beatmaps. It's grown over time, gaining new mechanics and a wide range of mods, making it one of the most versatile rhythm games in existence. ■



Format PC **Dev** Alchemedium **ETA** 2018 **Web** bit.ly/gmtofutail

#3 A TOFU TAIL

Why you *can* polish a curd



yan Brolley was working in what he calls "a boring day job" when he had an idea for a procedurally generated puzzle game. He wasn't in the industry at the time, he merely wanted to start making a game. It was only supposed to be a learning experience, a starter project to acclimatise to game development. "I had this simple idea – [I thought] it would be easy to execute," he laughs. This was six years ago.

During that time, A Tofu Tail has changed quite a bit, though it still has its original theme. "I was doing a lot of research into Japanese lore, and found out that the kitsune, the Japanese fox – its favourite food is tofu," he says. It fit perfectly with his idea of a cube absorbing colours to move around isometric stages. "I just thought, 'We can do something with this,'" he says.

The object is still to move your chunk of tofu through mazes, one step at a time, absorbing the colours and properties of the squares you roll across to get past hazards and enemies taken from Japanese folktales, including the kappa and tengu. But there's a fundamental difference from the original version in that the levels are now hand-crafted. "After seeing people play through the procedurally-generated mazes, it was clearly fun but it was missing something," Brolley explains. Building everything by hand may have taken much longer, but it's improved his game. And while it's been downsized from a planned 13 realms to seven, there will be more than 100 levels in the finished game.

Developing remains a leisure-time gig for Brolley – though an earlier build was enough to earn him an industry job. Now Archimedium has a core team of three working on A Tofu Tail, with a few outside contributors helping with art, music and narrative design to finish the game off. "The first 90 per cent's done, and the last 90 per cent's still to go!" Brolley jokes. This slice of tofu might be six years old, but it still looks pretty tasty to us..



Other games where you get to play as a block of bean curd include Resident Evil 2 (as an unlockable secret character) and mobile platformer To-Fu Fury.



Format TBA **Developer** Mighty Moth **ETA** Spring 2019 **Web** bit.ly/gmabove

#4 ABOVE

Not all plane sailing – but it looks like the air is the safest place to be



t appears to be becoming a habit among today's indie developers: a small team tinkers with an idea in their spare time before taking the plunge and forming their own studio to finally get their game made. And Above's origins are no different. A group of Danes calling themselves Mighty Moth is behind this top-down adventure where you fly around a world of sky pirates and sea monsters.

It's set in a flooded world, with just a few patches of land poking above the surface to form archipelagos. For the most part you'll soar over them, the camera taking a distant bird's-eye-view of a pillarbox-red propeller plane reminiscent of the one in Pilotwings. You'll fly over lighthouses and flocks of gulls, while surfacing leviathans will give you a fright when you're out at sea. These, it turns out, are central to the game's story, though the full extent of their role is unclear.

If you want to stretch your legs, you simply find a place to touch down and you can wander around the sparsely populated islands, talking to fellow pilots or upgrading your plane – perhaps to eventually confront that underwater menace head on, because while we're promised we can tackle the leviathans, there's no way we're doing it in the little red plane we've seen so far. And as if that isn't enough to contend with, a group of murderous cultists offers a different kind of threat for you to deal with. So much for a relaxing flight.

"SURFACING LEVIATHANS WILL GIVE YOU A FRIGHT"



Why, that giant shadow in the waves isn't ominous at all, is it? We certainly hope these lighthouse keepers are getting hazard pay...



COMING OUT

Fighting for queerness in games

By Sam Greer



As a queer person who's been gaming pretty much all her life, it's blatantly obvious to me just how scarce the kind of representation I want, perhaps need, is in videogames. 179. That's the number of commercially released games my search found that feature queer characters. It might seem a lot, but in the grand scheme of thousands upon thousands of released games, it's really not much. It's even less when you consider how few of those characters are even significant. Of those 179 games, only 83 have queer characters who are playable. And of those, only eight feature a main character who is pre-written as queer as opposed to them being queer as an option. Just eight.

There's more to representation than numbers but they certainly highlight the issue at hand. Which is to say nothing of how poor or outright offensive some of that representation is.

Back in the '90s queer characters were scarcely present in any of the mainstream media available, but in videogames they were almost nonexistent. The first game to feature the word homosexual was the 1995 text adventure The Orion Conspiracy. Players took on the role of a father searching for his missing son and incidentally in the course of that investigation, they meet their son's boyfriend and learn about his sexuality.

The first game to actually feature a queer character was 1986's Moonmist, where one of the randomly selected plotlines featured an artist, Vivian, who was in a relationship with another woman, Dierdre, who was married to a man. Dierdre is deceased by the time of the game, though – heaven forbid two women have an ongoing and happy relationship in fiction.

Perhaps more significant than either was 1998's Fallout 2. Not only was this classic RPG the first game to include same-sex marriage but it included it at a time when same-sex marriage was still illegal around the world. Civil partnership didn't even exist in the UK yet.

GTA: Sans-inclusivity

Of course, the vast majority of what queer content existed was, well, awful. You couldn't grow up around gaming without being exposed to the medium's biggest series, Grand Theft Auto. Rockstar's magnum opus was chock-full of homophobia and stereotypical queer characters who were only there to be the butt of jokes. Gaming's poster child was anything but inclusive.

Transgender characters, especially, were the subject of much derision and stereotyping. The ongoing saga of Nintendo character Birdo's gender has become a running joke. Final Fight's developer Capcom felt that players would feel bad beating up a woman, so its bizarre "solution" was to write into the manual that female enemy Poison was transgender, which is wrong on so many levels it really deserves some sort of award. This trend still continues today in a handful of more recent titles – for example, Atlus' Catherine, which treats the gender identity of the character Erica as an elaborate joke.

But then things began to change.

EA and Maxis' The Sims was an absolute phenomenon that even those who didn't game regularly or at all found themselves playing, which makes it pretty cool that the debut game shipped with same-sex relationships. In truth it's an inclusion that only came to be due to an oversight; queer relationships had been removed from the game but were re-added when programmer Patrick J Barrett III was accidentally given an old design document and simply re-implemented them (bless you, Patrick). To



The Sims might be hugely popular but its inclusive attitude, a rarity at release, tends to be forgotten.

"ROCKSTAR'S MAGNUM OPUS WAS CHOCK-FULL OF HOMOPHOBIA... GAMING'S POSTER CHILD WAS ANYTHING BUT INCLUSIVE"

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt's Ciri is an important, powerful character – and implied to be gay or bisexual.

their credit the developer and publisher did embrace it after this, to the point where expansion Hot Date was marketed on the basis of its potential queer relationships with an advert where two men hook up at the club. (Look, small steps okay?)

> "I THINK DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, IS JUST A TOOL STORYTELLERS NEED TO USE. IT LETS YOU TELL STORIES YOU COULDN'T OTHERWISE TELL"

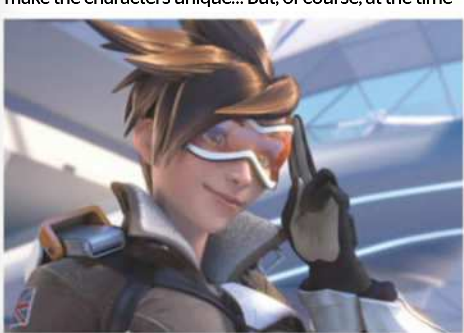
Unjaded Empire

The biggest sea change for queer representation during the decade that followed was Bioware's lauded RPGs. While it wouldn't be until 2005's martial arts epic Jade Empire that queer relationships became an option for the player character, Bioware took its first clear step towards better inclusivity in Knights Of The Old Republic with Juhani, the Star Wars' universe's first canonically gay character. Though her sexuality was far from explicit, with a fair number of players unaware that this was even the case, it was the start of something bigger for Bioware.

"When we created Juhani in KOTOR, we were just trying to find an interesting character," Drew Karpyshyn, writer on KOTOR, Jade Empire, and Mass Effect, explains. "We were just trying to find ways to make the characters unique… But, of course, at the time there weren't [any] gay characters or bi characters in Star Wars so we had to tread pretty carefully."

2007's Mass Effect wasn't the first Bioware game to do queer romance but it was here where the game's sheer popularity and the fondness for the characters generated a significant queer audience – something that led to each subsequent Mass Effect title and Bioware's fantasy series Dragon Age including more and more options for queer romance.

"I think the big thing is we want to be inclusive to the audience but the reason that we want to do that is because we're telling interesting stories, we're telling stories about interesting characters so we're doing it because we want to tell a good story and I think diversity, inclusion, is just a tool storytellers need to use. It lets you tell stories you couldn't otherwise tell, to reach audiences you wouldn't otherwise reach." Karpyshyn explains.





As Bioware catered to a neglected audience, greater inclusion began to take hold elsewhere. The first Borderlands featured no queer characters, but for the sequel, writer Anthony Burch – known for webseries Hey Ash, Watcha Playing? – was brought on board, and his presence was the start of a push for change.

"The idea was to work on characters that were not the norm of what you'd expect from a triple-A shooter where it's typically cis het white bros," Burch says of his work on the game. His efforts took root elsewhere in the studio."Eventually it got to the point where it wasn't even my idea to make [Janey] Springs gay in Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel. That was just something Matt Armstrong, one of our lead designers, came up with and it was really cool to see."

Borderlands' inclusion of queer characters came under fire – not just from homophobic boglins online, but from members of the queer community who felt that the characters' sexual identities were too explicit. "[I] don't really care about that critique because I think it implies that gay people should stay in their lane or it should be a thing you discover slowly rather than allowing someone to express themselves the way they want to. So like I'm bisexual and I tend to be the kind of person who just brings that up early. So the characters I write tend to as well," says Burch.



Shepard from Mass Effect could have several queer relationships depending on player choice.

While some things have changed for the better over the years, other aspects of queer representation have simply taken a step sideways. Early titles, for example 2001's Fear Effect prequel Retro Helix, marketed their lesbian couples as titillation, making them eye candy for the games' perceived audience of young teenage boys rather than valid, rounded characters. We don't really see that any more (thank goodness), but nowadays we do see publishers queer-baiting, which is to say touting inclusion in an attempt to gain kudos and to market a game to a queer audience while completely failing to follow up in the game itself. Tracer may be the poster child for Blizzard's massive success Overwatch, but the fact she's a lesbian is left to a small online comic with no mention of her sexuality making it into the game itself. Years of being starved of representation have left the queer community grasping onto the thinnest of subtexts in titles such as Final Fantasy and Tomb Raider, things that seemed to be played up in recent games but again without ever becoming explicit.

Breakout game Gone Home helped change things by not just being inclusive but having a story centred entirely around queerness. In Gone Home, Katie is visiting her family's new home only to find them absent, and so players must explore the house and discover what has occurred in her years away. Its through this that Katie learns the story of her young sister Sam, who has been coming to terms with her sexuality and falling in love with a girl at her school, Lonnie.

To have a game that focused entirely on a small story about identity with no fantastical elements whatsoever, was quite the revelation. For developer Steve Gaynor, one of the founders of Fullbright Games, the story was the entire point.

"It was Karla [Zimonja] (co-founder of Fullbright Games) and I talking about what kind of game we wanted to make, which was a game where you discover the story just by exploring an environment and there's no combat and there's no Myst style puzzles or anything," Gaynor explains. "It's just this place. And that gave us the opportunity to make a story that was just about normal people, which there's not a lot of in games and there wasn't at that time certainly. So we were like 'What if the place is just a family's house? What is the conflict or the drama within that family? What happened there?' And we arrived at this idea of there being this generational conflict between Sam's parents and her about who she's in love with."

Gaynor's efforts to make the story as authentic as possible even ended up bringing new faces to the studio "I interviewed Emily Carroll... just because I knew her from my online social circles and I wanted to talk to women who had grown up queer in the '90s or around that time, so reached out to Emily, that's how I met [her wife] Kate Craig." Kate worked on the game as an environment artist, and Emily provided illustrations.

Memory games

While Kate was mainly involved in building Gone Home's rooms and objects, filling every inch with period authenticity, her own experiences informed the shape of

Billie Lurk was a prominent bisexual character. Dishonored 2 also included trans character Mindy Blanchard.



some of the game's story as well. "I had a lot of friends growing up who, when they came out to their parents, their parents acted not with anger but a sense of… like, they were very patronising or a sense of disbelief, the 'it's just a phase' sort of thing. Part of that made it into the game certainly, it's in the dining room I believe, the conversation Sam has, but that's something that I watched friend after friend have that conversation and it always went that way. Because you have nice parents or whatever growing up and a nice home but they're maybe a little bit conservative so the way they respond isn't normally in the case of my immediate friends, not anger really, it was just a "you don't know what you want" sort of thing."

We've now begun to see big studios invest in Queer representation. Dishonored: Death Of The Outsider, Prey, and The Witcher 3 all feature prominent queer characters who are playable. Yet none of those struck a chord quite the way episodic title Life Is Strange did. The game about teen life danced around a subtext of queerness, but its prequel, Before The Storm, gave players an explicit romance between characters Chloe and Rachel. The game was handled by a different studio from the original – Deck9 Games.

"This simply came from trying to be true to the characters that Dontnod had created in Life Is Strange," game director Chris Floyd explains. "To listen to Chloe talk about Rachel, you know their relationship was intense. To Chloe, during the time after her father died and while Max was gone, Rachel meant everything. It could be a whirlwind platonic relationship, for sure, of the sort we can imagine high school girls striking up. But it could also be a life-altering romance. And that felt entirely true to those characters as we knew them… Allowing players to participate in this kind of love story immediately felt exciting and relevant and, frankly, necessary to us."

The Last Of Us also made a huge impact for queer representation in the AAA market. While the main game had one of its supporting cast, loner and ruthless survivor Bill, revealed quietly to be a gay man, it was the game's DLC, Left Behind, where main character Ellie was shown as queer, that resonated with many players. Plenty argued that it was a shame to see this representation relegated to DLC, but for many others, to have such a great and well-known character as Ellie in one of Sony's biggest titles be a lesbian felt like a momentous moment.

As happy as people were to see them, neither Life Is Strange nor The Last Of Us offer happy endings for its queer characters, however, playing into the unfortunately prevalent trope of Bury Your Gays in which queer characters frequently meet tragic ends.

Pride share

Still the response from fans, those who've gone a long time without representation in their favourite games, has been a source of pride for many of these creators.

"It was really encouraging," Anthony Burch says of the response to his games. "For every dude that hated the fact Torgue says friendzoning isn't a real thing or

We can only hope The Last Of Us Part II will feature Ellie's identity as a gay woman in a significant way.

reacted against all the social progressive stuff that was in the game there would be somebody who was like, "Hey, I didn't know I was trans till I played Borderlands," or "I didn't know I was asexual till I played as Maya and found somebody to identify with." Hearing that you've allowed somebody to use fiction to learn more about themselves, to feel more empowered, is the only time you can feel like 'Oh I'm doing a good thing by writing videogames.'"

Taking on the characters of Life Is Strange was quite the challenge for Chris Floyd but he couldn't be happier with the results. "I think we had a sense all along that this would be energising for many fans, who recognised Life Is Strange as a game that tells everyday stories that are often neglected. That's how we felt, so we were confident others would too. It was very satisfying to see them sharing some of our favourite scenes with Chloe and Rachel and discussing the love these two young women have for each other."

Perhaps the most meaningful representation can be found in smaller indie titles. Games such as Night In The Woods and Dream Daddy depict queerness with a casualness that's welcoming to those who've gone so long without seeing themselves in videogames. Steve Gaynor is incredibly excited about this change.

"When I look at games now after a bunch of years have passed and that stuff has continued to expand, and engines and software tools have gotten even more accessible and there's platforms like Itch.io, and Steam has opened up more, and so on. And I see games such as Butterfly Soup, one of my favourite games of last year, being made by a queer young woman about queer young women as a very direct personal thing. Not something like when I was working, "Well, gotta do a bunch of research." No, this is the person representing herself through this work and releasing it."

"A WHOLE GENERATION OF YOUNG QUEER PEOPLE ARE ABLE TO GROW UP SEEING PEOPLE LIKE THEMSELVES AND DISCOVERING THEIR STORIES"





Queer to stay

Butterfly Soup is a visual novel game about queer young women, available on indie platform Itch.io, by Brianna Lei. It shows their passion for baseball and their day-to-day lives, and feels authentic in a way almost nothing created by non-queer creators does. "There's just not enough media starring explicitly queer main characters, especially queer Asian American teens. Especially not games," she says. "I made this game hoping it would resonate with people, so it's super rewarding reading people's positive responses and seeing fanwork! While showcasing the game at GDC this year, someone cried when telling me how much they liked the game and I won't ever forget that. I want all my games to have this kind of impact on people." Though her measure of success isn't just about the fans she's gained.

"Every once in a while, I also see whiny comments from people who haven't played it, yet hate it. To me, this is a sign that I've made it! Whenever I see these I'm filled with energy that helps me keep making games that make narrow-minded people miserable."

The real victory of this progress is that a whole generation of young queer people are able to grow up seeing people like themselves and discovering their stories, to get a chance to better understand themselves. To see themselves as fully fledged individuals and heroes. The fight is far from over, but the future of queerness in games is looking brighter than ever.

HOW WE SCORE

0-39 Awful Avoid it as you would a bullet with your name on.
40-59 Poor Major issues here that won't be solved with a hug.
60-69 Decent A mixed bag filled with sweets and sharp stones.
70-79 Good Some flaws, but still a very enjoyable experience.
80-89 Excellent Buy it, love it, thank us when you're done.
90-100 Outstanding A rare and essential piece of brilliance.

The small print: We rate games in comparison to what else is available on the same system, in the same genre, and for the same format at the time of release. So this year's FIFA might score less than a FIFA from three years ago, but still be a better game. Because time, and our expectations, move on. Hey, you're smart, you get it...

GM GOLD AWARD Not awarded based simply on score, but rather given to games that possess a special blend of qualities. For instant classics that you won't regret owning.



Format PS4 (reviewed) XO, PC **Publisher** Ubisoft **Developer** Ubisoft Montreal
ETA Out now **Players** 1-12

FAR CRY 5

Ubisoft takes aim at the land of the free, but stops short of brave



Stopping is out of the question, because there are two cult members in a pickup truck behind us firing their turret through our rear window. Slowing down is inadvisable too, because the cultists forming a road block up ahead don't look like they're here to chat politely and leave a leaflet with us. As hard as this will be to argue with the insurance companies later, our best course of action is to speed up our own lorry, hoping to bash into the road block harder than the religious extremists have been bashing their Bibles round the local area.

So we accelerate, watching the cow skull ornament dangling perilously from the rearview mirror. It nearly works: we hit the two parked trucks at such an angle that our lorry wedges between them and forges a path through. Then comes the sickening mechanical crunch of that pursuing pickup hitting us from the back and sending us into a spin. We're now stationary, and we're stuck.

Things go from bad to worse: a van carrying some kidnapped 'sinners' who evidently didn't go for Project Eden's Gate's membership offer has spotted us, and the cultists have stopped to help their brothers out. Now out of the car and engaging in a firefight with eight to ten shirtless zealots, we notice that our fracas has completely blocked two roads.

Another van, this one carrying cult supplies, careers into the mess.

Now a helicopter's seen us. It opens fire and inadvertently blows up one of the pickup trucks. Pulling off one of the better shots of our career, we shoot the pilot in the head with a sniper bullet and watch in giddy satisfaction as the chopper begins an unmanned descent. Quite near to us. Hang on.

The resultant explosion kills everyone but us. Finally given a second to breathe, we stagger over to the kidnapped civilians and set them free, then over to the supply truck to loot it. A bear emerges from the truck and kills one of the civilians instantly. We shoot the other, in a panic. Then the bear kills us.

GM CERTIFIED 100% INDEPENDENT REVIEWS SINCE 1993

Big boys don't Cry

You can't really fault Far Cry 5 for the way it throws itself at you, claws out, teeth bared. This kind of coming together happens roughly every 12 seconds in the picturesque rolling hills, pine forests, and crystal lakes of Far Cry 5's Montana backwoods, and it asks something different of you as a player every time. That's what shooters ought to do.

This interplay between wildlife, hostile and friendly AI has long been Far Cry's calling card. Swap out cultists for pirates and bears for tigers, and that anecdote could just as easily be about 2012's Far Cry 3. What matters when a new one comes along isn't whether those catalysts for chaos are present – it's a given at this point. What matters is

"YOU'RE HERE TO SHOOT, NOT TALK, AND THAT'S ALWAYS GOING TO LIMIT THE NARRATIVE DEPTH"

Euphemisms for bull testicles used over the course of Far Cry 5: Rocky Mountain oysters, Prairie oysters, huevos del toros (and many more)


24m

Walking into Joseph Seed's own chapel with an arrest warrant: can't see this plan going wrong.

whether the set dressing surrounding the chaos has changed sufficiently that all the expertly iterated systemic gameplay feels like a new experience.

This is where we're in two minds about Ubisoft Montreal's latest release. It wants to do something new, it tries to do something new – and then, ultimately, it doesn't. Whatever furore surrounded its choice of settings in the run-up to release, the band of extremists running amok in rural America makes for a sinister and truly engaging foil. And the way you're introduced to them in the opening hour is exemplary: as part of a US Marshall team sent to take the cult down, you're flown via helicopter right into their headquarters. The plan is to land at their base and just walk up and arrest their leader. It feels like an absolutely terrible idea. Everyone in the chopper says so. You do it anyway.

It's wonderfully effective, bringing you right into the most dangerous place in the game in the opening seconds. You feel like you're filming a particularly risky episode of Louis Theroux's Weird Weekends, cast into an environment where the threat of violence might bubble over into realisation with one wrong word. Here the game's central antagonist, Joseph Seed, makes his presence known – he's a kind of Reverend Jim Jones by way of Matthew McConaughey with a man-bun. He offers no resistance when you come to take him away, but you and he both know things are about to tip over into chaos.

Ironically it's when things actually do kick off that the weight and intrigue of this setup loses something. It's inevitable that the cult should lose its mystique when the members reveal themselves to be 4,000 similar-looking bearded men carrying rifles, but it's still a shame: what you first see of Project Eden's Gate is people, not targets. People who made a choice to join a strange and brutal group and who now appear so devout in their conviction that they're blind to the depravity surrounding them. Far Cry 5's writers do their best to retain some sense of that central horror and intrigue – *why does this group exist?* – in the more linear moments when the story zooms right in on the Seed family: John, Jacob, Faith, and aforementioned head honcho Joseph. At times they all seem relatable, even persuasive. But you're here to shoot, not talk, and that's always going to limit the depth of the story.

"GOES FROM DUKES OF HAZZARD PASTICHE TO JONESTOWN MASSACRE ECHOES IN AN INSTANT"

Seeds of evil

With the linear opening behind you, the enormous world map reveals your task ahead: to fell the three Seed underbosses by stirring up a rebellion in each of the three regions of Hope Country they hold. Here's where the design falls into the prosaic: stirring up that rebellion feels more like filling up a progress bar than anything else. You earn Resistance Points for completing missions, freeing hostages, destroying cult property, and liberating outposts. In theory this means you can go about provoking the great rebellion as you see fit, roaming around Montana and overthrowing outposts if that's your thing, or mainlining the story



NO-ONE TELL PETA

Far Cry 5's strangest and most troubling mission

Ever attended a bull testicle-tasting festival? No, us neither. Although we don't hail from rural Montana like Far Cry 5's denizens, in all fairness.

To raise morale around the town of Fall's End, you're instructed at one point to gather the necessary materials for the Testy Festy. Haha, lol, etc etc – except doing so involves killing penned bulls with 1) a tractor, 2) fire, and 3) while it's mating. Animal slaughter has long been a core tenet of the Far Cry series, but it's usually a bit more justifiable, a 'kill or be killed' situation rather than 'cull 'em for a laugh'.





Like her brothers, Faith Seed is both relatable and despicable, and owns every cutscene she appears in.





Hunting is still worthwhile for bagging skins, but there's no crafting wallets out of weasel nipples any more.



TURN ON, TUNE IN, FAR OUT

The dribbling, screeching genius of Far Cry 5's Arcade mode

Right, it's like this: all you have to do is escape the room as quickly as possible. Sounds perfectly straightforward? Well, there are bears and goats roaming around the place, clocks floating in mid-air, and every now and then the floor is a wall and the ceiling is a staircase. Best foot forward, now.

That's just one of Far Cry Arcade's little curios. Arcade is accessed through – naturally – arcade cabinets in the game, and includes a powerful map editor so you can create your own little nightmares. Ubisoft started the ball rolling by creating a handful of scenarios, each a self-contained level built with various modifiers to offer a new experience, to show what's possible. The community will take the reins from there to populate Arcade with, as the men on E3 stages say, 'killer content'. Another Ubisoft-created map does a pretty convincing Hitman impression, plonking your sole target in a locked room in the middle of a heavily guarded shipping container depot. Levelling up by completing these snack-size portions of Far Cry in Arcade earns you money and Perk Points that carry over into the main game, and likewise Perks bought in the main game apply to Arcade. This is also where Far Cry 5's competitive multiplayer lives, in up to 6v6 format, but to our minds PUBG and Fortnite needn't be losing any sleep over its token deathmatch offering.

missions if you'd rather take a different approach to progressing.

Ubisoft Montreal has obviously made a conscious effort to move away from that time-honoured, almost self-parodying trope of climbing up a tower and unlocking a bunch of map markers. Far Cry 5 reveals its geographical goodies when you visit them in person (except one self-referential tower climb right at the start) in what feels like an effort to encourage a spirit of exploration instead of janitorial duties: climb tower, observe litter of icons on map, clean icons up methodically. And you can't really knock that; although a version of that system worked very well for Assassin's Creed Origins it does feel like time for a change in that aspect of open-world design.

However, getting players to really engage with the environment and its systems isn't as simple as changing how the map markers appear. Resistance Points are actually doled out in meagre fashion, so by the conclusion to each region you're simply scouring the map for more ways to fill up the bar rather than taking in the surroundings and taking opportunities as they present themselves. It's in these moments, while you're back on level-janitor duty, that you feel a keen sense of how many times you've shot at angry men in trucks with turrets mounted to them before, or snuck up behind a guy next to an alarm and broken his neck.

Prairie Oyster Cult

Far Cry 5 doesn't represent a leap forwards for the series or for its parent genre, then. But its scene-setting tractors, its fishing mini-game, its mullets, and its seaplane dogfights hold a kind of charm that means the slightly tired mechanical scaffolding holding it all together doesn't spoil the fun. Ubi Montreal has aced the tone of FC5, leaning on many a cliché about redneck America but always with a knowing wink that, somehow, sits well with the heavier subject matter at the game's core. It takes a deft touch to go from Dukes Of Hazzard pastiche to Jonestown massacre echoes in an instant, and it should be richly celebrated for doing so (with one notable exception – see 'No One Tell PETA', left).

Co-op play – another Ubi favourite – is fully functional here, although it doesn't feel like an emphasis. Play Borderlands alone and the world feels empty and lacking. Play Far Cry 5 alone and you're probably too busy staving off a wolverine with a shovel to notice you're all on your lonesome. Quite why only the host is afforded the luxury of persistent story and mission progress (the guest limited to cash and Perks) is unclear, but it limits the scope of the experience so you're only ever a temporary hired gun in someone else's game, not a true partner. That said, it's incredibly enjoyable to prowl around in a chopper together, then race each other to the floor playing parachute chicken. Competent AI hired guns join the fun too, in human, canine, and bear form, giving a quasi-co-op quality to even solo play.

For all the op-eds about its politics that circled around its prerelease appearances, and for all the countless more that will surely follow after its arrival, Far Cry 5 isn't a game that really holds a mirror up to society and poses tough questions. Although the writing isn't toothless as a social commentary piece, it's not a conversation starter either: like everything else, the writing's only there to serve the sandbox. What you have here is a fantastic place, built using some very familiar blocks, and just enough new ones to warrant a visit to Montana's least tourist-friendly county. ■

GM LOVES...

- The best thematic setup for the franchise yet.
- That trademark system-laden open world is back with zeal...

GM HATES...

- ...but those systems sometimes go haywire when they interact.
- The desire to do something new stops with the setting.

Better than...



Far Cry Primal
Caveman adventure Primal represents Far Cry's lowest ebb – a lacklustre reskin where the systems felt at odds with the prehistoric setting.

Worse than...



Assassin's Creed Origins
Ubisoft made good on Ancient Egypt with Origins in a way that Far Cry 5 never quite manages with cult-y modern Montana.

DLC





Season pass owners are in for an updated version of Far Cry 3 and B-movie-style add-ons set in the apocalypse, Vietnam war, and space: Dead Living Zombies, Hours Of Darkness, and Lost On Mars.

GM JUDGEMENT

79%



Neither toothless nor incendiary, Far Cry 5 does its setting justice but colours within the lines.
Phil Iwaniuk

The world might be as dark and miserable as ever but it's never looked so good.









Format PC **Publisher** Fatshark **Developer** Fatshark **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-4

WARHAMMER: VERMINTIDE II

Mickey Mouse clubbed house

The original Vermintide was a delightful Left 4 Dead clone that put the fantasy trappings of the Warhammer universe to excellent use. Instead of boring old zombies we got to battle hordes of cheeky ratmen called Skaven and instead of just shooting our way through, there was robust melee combat to get to grips with. The game's overall design was derivative of Valve's classic, but the final execution was refreshing.

To describe this sequel as simply bigger and better is not entirely inaccurate, but it does the game a disservice. Vermintide II is a truly massive overhaul that polishes what was there before to a fine sheen while adding huge amounts of variety.

After halting the plans of Clan Fester (the Skaven have a very strong brand) in the original game, our heroes were captured. This game begins with you breaking out of captivity, in an elaborate tutorial level, just in time to discover that the Skaven have now joined forces with the barbarian Chaos Warriors from up north. Now it's up to our heroes to thwart their nefarious plans all over again and postpone the end of the world for a second time.

Chaos theory

The inclusion of these demon-worshipping killers is the major shake-up to Vermintide's formula. Where the Skaven are small and nimble, the men of Chaos are lumbering brutes. It's tougher for them to swarm you, but each packs considerably more punch than a ratman, meaning they absolutely demand your attention in combat. It's the combinations created out of the two forces that make Vermintide II a real challenge, forcing you to change tactics and priorities.

Of course variety isn't just owed to the inclusion of Chaos; the rats themselves have been overhauled, with several types of new Skaven joining the fray. There's a Berserker class, for example, that blends in with crowds – and are absolutely deadly if they get close. Keeping an eye out for their distinctive green cloaks is a must if you want to avoid nasty surprises, forcing you to look at the teeming swarms with fresh eyes.

In fact, between the two forces comes a whole gallery of special enemies. Throat-grabbing Packmasters and skulking Gutter Runners return, but there are now spell casting Blightstormers and Lifeleechers. As for mini-bosses, the first game only offered players the threat of a giant Rat Ogre but now there are Bile Trolls and Stormfiends, plus plenty more.

To tackle these monstrosities you'll be given the option of five heroes – the same

present in the original game, but this time they each have three distinct classes with differing skill trees. Choosing to invest in a class is a long-term commitment that comes with great rewards for those who put the time in. Each one has a passive power as well as a special ability that's charged by slaying foes. These come in a variety of forms, from homing attacks to taunts that draw enemies toward you, and they make each hero feel even more distinct from the others, to the point that the make-up of your four-player team will dictate heavily just how combat encounters play out. If you've got a dwarf who can offer a one-man shield wall, you're going to be able to rely on your ranged units more. If your soldier gives you squad-wide strength boosts, then you'd better believe your melee-focused team is going to have a time.

Smashing time

And those up-close brawls feel better than ever, too. It was already a highlight of the first game, but the improved animation and feedback in the sequel is tremendous. Every swing has heft, and the feel of each weapon type is nailed. Swing a hammer around and you'll send enemies reeling; use a rapier, and you'll find you're barely pushing your enemies an inch, but are absolutely slicing them to pieces. It's gory and gruesome, but in that grimly gleeful Warhammer way.

The main strength of these heroes isn't their fighting prowess, though, but the writing and performances behind them. Grim fantasy might usually be full of grumbling gruff types, but the heroes of Vermintide are real fun to be around. The banter between characters during a mission regularly summons a chuckle out of us, and their rapport with each other, that ribbing between old friends, is incredibly endearing. It really helps the co-op gameplay thrive that its heroes are such fun to be around.

There are three acts to the game, and they can be tackled in any order. Each has its own final boss, and takes you through a host of different environments. Those differences aren't just aesthetic either (though Vermintide II's world is certainly beautifully detailed). The game takes you from claustrophobic ruins to wide-open farmland and the battles feel significantly different in each location. The AI director also puts that great enemy variety to use, ensuring no two runs of a level are the same by dropping in different bosses and ambushes at various points in each playthrough.

Of course, getting round to a second stab at the campaign might take a while, as the game's difficulty means you'll probably have to make multiple attempts at a mission before you find success. The level of challenge is both a boon and a curse. On the one hand, paired with the well-drawn levels, you get a real sense of overcoming the odds and having been on a journey with every single mission you complete. On the other hand, with no checkpoints throughout a level, repeat failures can be an incredibly frustrating experience. It can feel a little cheap, too, as the random nature of the AI director means one run-through can be a breeze while the next is a brutal gauntlet, depending on which enemies get dropped on you. (Rat Ogre again? Nope, it's a Stormfiend. Lucky us.) It's easy for a sense of hopelessness to descend.

That over-steep difficulty curve is the game's one and only major weakness though. In every other regard Warhammer: Vermintide II is a huge, polished, and robust co-op action game that easily stands side by side with the genre-defining Left 4 Dead – and in some areas, even surpasses it. There's a greater degree of depth to this sequel, but the core combat is satisfying enough on its own to keep you returning for another go, and thanks to the new enemies, it'll feel fresh every time you return. Even if the smell of all those dead rats will be anything but... ■

"IT'S GORY AND GRUESOME, BUT IN THE MOST GRIMLY GLEEFUL WAY THERE IS"

How did the team prepare themselves for this review? By rattling off puns!

PEST CONTROL

A cast of unlikely heroes who just love smashing rats

The heroes of Vermintide return, now calling themselves the Ubersreik Five. (Hey, if the Skaven get to have a team name, so can they.) What's more, they've got a whole load of new weapons and abilities to help exterminate the Skaven and Chaos. Let's introduce our brutal bunch...



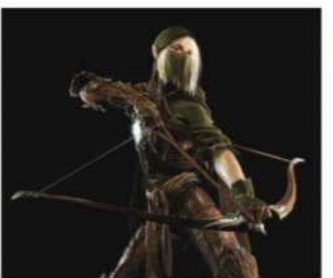
1 Markus Kruber, a soldier and friendly sort coming with a host of abilities to buff his teammates.



2 Victor Saltzpyre, Witch Hunter. Has a troubled past with Sienna, but they've set aside their differences.



3 Bardin Goreksson. A proud dwarf, but one who praises his teammates. Has a penchant for loud folk songs.



4 Kerillian, snarky elf. Loathes her companions but she's a softie really. Just don't tell her we said that.



5 Sienna Fuegonasus. Pyromancer who gets off on arson. She's a wildcard, but that flaming hair is a look.



DOOM TOWN RATS

A killer soundtrack

Composer Jesper Kyd returns for the sequel, bringing the unsettling, energetic score of the first game back and introducing a whole new set of tunes for the Chaos Warriors. As the latter are hideous worshippers of twisted gods, expect lots of drums and guttural chants. Music is also an integral part of gameplay with specific themes signalling certain enemies. Learning the soundtrack will absolutely give you an edge.

GM LOVES...

- First-person melee combat has never felt better or more brutal.
- Enemy variety means the nasty surprises are endless.
- The visuals are great, even if the world is truly bleak.

GM HATES...

- The difficulty can be unpredictable and frustrating.

Better than...



Destiny 2
Vermintide II is less loot-driven, so might not please your acquisitive side so much, but as co-op action it gives Bungie's latest a good kicking.

Worse than...



Total War: Warhammer II
They're different genres, we know, but it's hard to argue that the strategy title isn't the best adaptation of Warhammer fantasy to date.

NEED TO KNOW



While the game is currently only available on Steam (for a very reasonable £22.99) Fatshark has plans to bring its co-op action game to both PlayStation 4 and Xbox One in future.

GM JUDGEMENT



89%

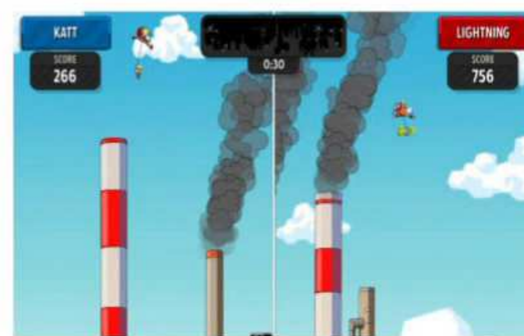


When it comes to co-op action, Warhammer: Vermintide II stands out from the pack.
Sam Greer

GM **Review**
The Final Verdict!


Showdown has the same charming art style as the other titles in the Scribblenauts series.





Format Switch, PS4 (reviewed), XO **Publisher** Warner Bros
Developer Shiver Entertainment **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-4

SCRIBBLENAUTS SHOWDOWN

Scrabble with shotguns and samurai swords

Scribblenauts is a charming little series of games where players can use words to summon an almost unfathomably vast array of objects and alter the world to help them solve puzzles. Found an angry polar bear? Summon a fish to cheer him up. Or summon Cthulhu and let the Old One himself go on a rampage. Positively daft, the series has always been a fun, if shallow, set of puzzle games.

Spin-off Showdown takes things in a more competitive direction. A sandbox mode exists for players to muck around in, and features a series of different environments, but the meat of the game is a Mario Party-esque multiplayer mode. Up to four players work their way across a board, drawing cards as they go and competing against each other in 1v1 minigames. At the start of most of these diversions a category or letter is randomly selected, and then the players have to come up with an object to use in the minigame that fits the theme or starts with the letter – and will help them win. Need to choose a mount for a race and have the letter T? Try a train. Or a truck. But under no account a tortoise.

There are laughs to be had in creatively interpreting these limitations, and even room for a little black humour, despite the child-friendly structure. For example, when asked to pick ammo for our catapult, with the theme 'things found in a playground', we can't resist typing in 'children'. Sadly, though there's no social aspect such as that found in the Jackbox games, or Sony's Playlink titles, so you've no incentive to get clever and creative beyond just earning the approving chuckles (or horrified stares) of your friends.

Paired down

It's a shame, too, that the minigames only support two players, even though you can have four on the board. It's an odd exclusion – nothing about the activities makes them suited to only duos.

The cards you use to make your way across the board and initiate minigames allow for some degree of depth but ultimately the randomness of the draw means one player can have an abundance of cards to move themselves forward while everyone else ends up stuck with cards that can only allow them to draw more cards – an action that frequently feels pointless.

There's also a host of minigames that don't even require wordplay, just some motion controls and rapid button mashing, which sort of defeats the whole point of the game. If you're not going to make use of the gimmick, why bother?

This leaves Showdown mode feeling pretty bares bones and slightly unfair. It's perfect for a couple of short sessions with friends but not something to hold your attention for much longer than that. Assuming the audience is strictly young children – and that's definitely who much of the game seems to be aimed at – Scribblenauts has mileage as a simple, wholesome distraction that will make them laugh. Sandbox mode, especially, will likely provide plenty of silly fun and games for hours. Compared with more robust child-friendly titles such as Minecraft, though, Scribblenauts' limited creativity and lack of depth will be unlikely to appeal much more to kids than adults in the long run. ■

"THE MINIGAMES ONLY SUPPORT TWO PLAYERS, EVEN THOUGH YOU CAN HAVE FOUR ON THE BOARD"

How do you defeat Cthulhu in Scribblenauts? Turns out he's surprisingly vulnerable to falling over on banana peels...

GM LOVES...

- The type-it-and-it-appears gimmick is as strong as ever.
- Wordplay adds a fun twist to otherwise simple minigames.

GM HATES...

- It's all very shallow, making the fun pretty short-lived.
- The two-player limitation in minigames is disappointing.

Better than...



Disney Infinity
Okay, Infinity's action is rather more robust, but you don't have to buy expensive lumps of plastic to summon things in Scribblenauts...

Worse than...



Minecraft
Scribblenauts Showdown might keep kids entertained for a few hours, but this infinite craft-'em-up will take over their whole lives.

NEED TO KNOW



To unlock new items for characters and extra sandboxes, you'll need to earn 'Starites'. You get them from doing almost everything as you play, so unlocking new stuff is quick and easy.

GM JUDGEMENT





A fun distraction with some word-based cleverness, but it's far less substantial that it should be.
Sam Greer



Getting Chuchel out of bed is your first challenge. It's not as easy as it sounds.







Format PC (reviewed), Mobile **Publisher** Amanita Design **Developer** Amanita Design **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

CHUCHEL

Aaaaarrghrraaaarghaaaaah!

Some games are just pure joy. Mario games have long since captured this undiluted strain of fun: playful, varied, and only too happy to mix things up. Every moment is an amusing discovery, and you can't wait to share it with someone. Then there's Chuchel. It's pure mania. Every moment is hilarious, bizarre, and you have no idea how you're going to explain any of it to anyone.

Essentially a point-and-click puzzle game in the vein of Amanita Design's previous games Samorost and Machinarium, Chuchel mixes things up with sheer absurdism. You play as the titular Chuchel, a ball of black fluff with arms and legs but – most importantly – one big, loud mouth. It's the sounds he makes that define this little character and make him such a pleasure to be around. Furious yells and self-satisfied chuckles are his trademark, never failing to put a smile on your face. The sound design is exquisite; from the music to sound effects, the entire game bounces with energy in a way few others manage.

The minimalist world has a scratchy, hand-drawn feel that perfectly matches the off-beat jokes and gags. Strange, illogical creatures inhabit a world composed of random but otherwise mundane objects. There's something childlike about it all, every puzzle and character adhering to its own logic.

Fuzzy logic

Chuchel is perpetually furious because a giant hand has taken his favourite cherry and refuses to give it back. The game follows a series of puzzles and setpieces as the creature tries to retrieve his prize fruit, all while competing with his rival (a little pink rat, obviously). Puzzles are seldom especially difficult; mostly they're there to make you laugh. Sometimes all you have to do is click on an object, such as one sequence that presents you with a mysterious switch. You have to press it to progress, but you just know something bad is going to happen to Chuchel, who is all too eager to press the button himself. It's from this dissonance between the player's foresight and the hero's recklessness that much of the humour springs. We see mistakes ahead of our little friend, but he's just all too eager to throw himself into one problem after another. Adorable.

Plenty of laughs come from the unexpected, too. Chuchel's surreal world throws surprises at you constantly. From a snail creature concealing a videogame arcade to universe-altering hats, from a battle through the clouds to getting trapped in Tetris, Chuchel constantly flies in the face of common sense and makes you embrace its bizarre world with a grin.

Comedy is rare in videogames, and comedy that actually lands all the rarer, but Chuchel's eccentric nature is always truly hilarious. It's irreverent in the best possible way, eager to pull the rug out from under you in a delightful slapstick fashion. It's never mean-spirited, and even though many gags come at Chuchel's expense, he's only ever got himself to blame.

From the opening screen, where you must battle with Chuchel to wake him up to the moments when his cherry is within his grasp, his enthusiasm is infectious. A perfect escape from reality, you'll laugh as loudly as the fuzzball himself. ■

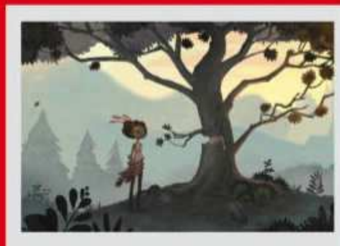
"COMEDY IS RARE IN VIDEOGAMES AND COMEDY THAT ACTUALLY LANDS ALL THE RARER"

How long did Sam spend trying to figure out how to pronounce Chuchel? She still hasn't worked it out.

GM LOVES...

- Chuchel himself is a fuzzy ball of furious delight.
- It mixes things up regularly, so you never get bored.
- The sound design is flawlessly joyful. That yell of fury!
- The puzzles tickle your funny bone as well as tease your brain.

Better than...



Broken Age
While Double Fine's adventure has its fun, it just can't keep up with Chuchel's manic spirit. Not even Jack Black can match his laugh.

Worse than...



Kentucky Route Zero
Chuchel's jam-packed with laughs, but it doesn't quite get under the skin the way the melancholic and strange Kentucky Route Zero does.

NEED TO KNOW



The game's joyful soundtrack was composed by the band DVA, who previously collaborated with the studio on Botanicula, which received the IGF award for Excellence In Audio.

GM JUDGEMENT

90%



A perfectly madcap adventure, full of irreverent humour that will fill you with joy.
Sam Greer

Despite its sparse surroundings, new location Onomichi isn't lacking in silly surprises if you know where to look.

Format PS4 **Publisher** Sega **Developer** Sega **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

YAKUZA 6: THE SONG OF LIFE

Sayonara to Sega's crime epic

Despite the Yakuza series having been around for over a decade, it's only been in the past year that more people have become enamoured with its quintessential Japanese charm, which makes it even more bittersweet that its first outing designed exclusively for PS4 is also a swan song for its protagonist Kazuma Kiryu. After Nathan Drake and Geralt Of Rivia, we may have become more accustomed to saying goodbye to videogame characters for good, but Sega doesn't just succeed in delivering an emotional finale, it does so while continuing the series' careful balance of the heartfelt with the absolutely bonkers.

Newcomers may find the story initially daunting. It continues right where Yakuza 5 left off, with Kiryu imposing a three-year prison sentence on himself. While he's in the chokey, his adopted daughter Haruka also goes on a self-imposed exile only to wind up having a baby. That's not to mention tensions brewing in the criminal underworld, with more yakuza coups and all-out war with a ruthless Chinese triad organisation muscling in on Tokyo, which, of course, you get dragged into once you're a free man again. But whether or not you need to read up on backstories, what's not daunting is finding your way around the red-light district of Kamurocho.

Running on technology built for PS4 hardware for the first time, these familiar streets look more impressively detailed than ever, and exploration is a more seamless affair. Gone are the annoying loading times whenever you enter a shops, while street brawls can occur over larger spaces. The UI has also been overhauled, with improved menus appearing as apps on Kiryu's fancy smartphone – which you can, of course, also use for taking selfies.

Included on the phone is the new levelling system, which is neatly tied to everything you do. Whether you're just following the next plot point, getting caught up in fights or engaging in the myriad of diversions on offer, you'll always gain skill points related to certain attributes, such as strength or charm. You can then spend these to either raise basic stats or unlock new abilities from a list, giving you more free rein than a skill tree. Naturally, story missions net you more skill points, but it means you can happily go a few rounds of Virtua Fighter 5 or keep eating until your stomach bursts and still get something out of it.

"ONE OF THE MOST HEART-RENDING CLIMAXES WE'VE PLAYED FOR ANY VIDEOGAME PROTAGONIST"

One step forward...

But for all the series has done to catch up with the times, it's not without trade-offs. With all its visual improvements, it takes a PS4 Pro just to ensure a steady frame rate, which has already been halved compared to Yakuza 0 and Kiwami's 60fps performance. Conspicuous roadworks also seal off a chunk of the northern part of town, while some past establishments are now purely set dressing. It doesn't necessarily mean



DAD SIMULATOR

Baby on board

After a hit-and-run incident leaves Haruka comatose for most of the game, Kiryu takes matter into his own hands to keep her baby safe.

As it turns out, it's hard to get things done when you have to carry a baby around, and it's at its most awkward when you're forced to use the DualShock's motion controls to keep hungry little Haruto from crying while running around looking for baby formula in the middle of the night. Fortunately, this ordeal only lasts for about a chapter before other characters kindly take the responsibility off your hands. Think gangsters are hard? Parenting is *really* hard.



Gangs attack in greater numbers than before but you're also never too far away from grabbing a bicycle.





Kiryu's been a karaoke king and cabaret casanova, but he can now also be a Puyo Puyo master.



CLASH OF CLANS

Command and conquer the streets of Japan

While there's no shortage of distractions on offer around Kamurocho and Onomichi, the most substantial side-quest on offer is Clan Creator, an RTS minigame where you command entire street gangs in full-on brawls.

You've got your standard foot soldiers, but the stand-outs are leaders with special skills such as AOE attacks or even healing. Some leaders you can recruit through side-quests, but you can also unlock rare ones – including series regulars Majima and Daigo and even real Japanese Pro Wrestlers – using Clan Codes that Sega has been sneaking around online in the run-up to launch (more are planned post-launch).

Yet Clan Creator lacks the quirky charms of Kiryu's past careers as a taxi driver or a real estate magnate. Besides, when you already get to bash in street thugs in the more viscerally satisfying real-time combat, merely marshalling forces doesn't feel as compelling – even if it can reach up to 100v100 chaos.

The main draw may be that you can also train your army and upload it online against other players, as well as take part in ranked raids and weekly events. Still, you can't help but wonder if it isn't simply a testing ground for where the series may be heading, as the next Yakuza entry, sans Kiryu, is set to be an online free-to-play game that's also being released for mobile and PC. It'd be a shame if, after Kiryu's legacy, this is all that's left.

there's less content than before, but for every addition there's a subtraction. For instance, Club Shine has the largest roster of hostesses you can merrily acquaint yourself with, but it's also now the sole hostess club you can visit, while the new Rizap gym gives you a variety of workout minigames but at the expense of the bowling alley around the corner.

Perhaps you can put it down to quality over quantity. It's not just minigames such as the aforementioned hostess bars or playing darts that have had an overhaul – so has the combat. There's a concerted effort to merge Kiryu's fighting styles as opposed to splitting them into three distinct styles as in 0 and Kiwami. The Heat gauge you built up in fights in previous Yakuzas has also been replaced by orbs that you can spend either on one brutal move or on triggering Extreme Heat mode, which delivers extra QTE-prompted damage while protecting you from getting staggered by all but the strongest enemies.

What may be more of a sore point for fans is the regular cast, or lack thereof. It's wise for this finale to be centred on Kiryu but it's also a shame that, bar longtime friend and police detective Date and charismatic moneylender Akiyama, many series favourites are essentially left out of the action.

Dinosaur of Dojima

In truth, it's because only half your time will be spent in Kamurocho, as events take Kiryu to the coastal town of Onomichi in Hiroshima. Given how you're called 'gramps' by every whippersnapper hoodlum, the serene yet sparse locale seems exactly the sort of place Kiryu might spend his retirement, just not where you'd expect to find a formidable yakuza organisation, let alone the backdrop to a high-stakes finale. Nonetheless, despite the absence of old allies, the new cast you meet are a likeable bunch. Though you may pine for the urban vices, different minigames also spring up with their own unique charm, including one that can be best described as a pub simulator. Be warned, many of these don't appear on the map until you've triggered the relevant side-quest, which means that just following the main path can risk you overlooking these entertaining diversions altogether.

But you don't want to miss out all the weirdness Yakuza 6 has to offer. Many side-quests spring out of nowhere when you're hurrying to the next objective and hadn't considered listening to an aspiring idol's woes or helping a body-swapping couple among your priorities. But when the main story's double-crossings and political overreaching gets too lengthy and convoluted for its own good, these trivial genre-hopping flights of fancy are exactly what you need for a breather.

In many cases, there's even a spot of fan service as some side-quests reference past games or feature returning minor characters, showing how the passing of time has affected them, while others also tie into the main themes of parenthood.

Perhaps these are all just to stall the inevitable. You can't escape the fact that this is, without spoiling anything, Kiryu's decisive bowing out – it makes for one of the most heart-rending climaxes we've played for any videogame protagonist. While it's not actually the end for the series, it's tough to imagine how it'll continue without him. It's just as well that there's a post-game to let you freely wander between the two locales and change the time of day while you continue chasing down every silly secret there is to discover or minigame to master. You're going to want to savour every second you have with Kiryu. ■

What is Yakuza 6's best new minigame? The internet cafe. Trust us, watching Kiryu type is... it's really something.

GM LOVES...

- A seamless world where every activity can boost your stats.
- The perfect mix of genuine emotion and fun silliness.

GM HATES...

- Get ready for lengthy cutscenes and dense dialogue.
- We felt the lack of some series regulars and old haunts.

CATCHING UP WITH KAZ

The best Yakuza games for newcomers to the series



Yakuza 0

The prequel sheds the series bloat, while fan favourite Majima is also playable (and he has the *best* minigame ever).



Yakuza Kiwami

Remake of the original PS2 game using 0's engine with all-new content. We'll be getting Kiwami 2 in the West in August, so play this now.

NEED TO KNOW



Many characters' faces are modelled on real actors, and you may actually recognise Beat Takeshi – best known as blind samurai Zatoichi. Here, he plays a seemingly laid-back crime boss.

GM JUDGEMENT

90%



A fitting swan song for Japanese gaming's finest protagonist, balancing drama with bonkers fun.
Alan Wen



Play alone and the partner AI does a great job of knowing which action to perform when.





Format Switch **Publisher** Nintendo **Developer** HAL Laboratory **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-4

KIRBY STAR ALLIES

With brainwashed enemies like these, who need friends?



Nintendo fans were well fed in 2017. Super Mario Odyssey, Breath Of The Wild, and Xenoblade 2 put us in a virtual food coma from which we are only just emerging. Kirby may seem a poor choice of halfway house; anyone who inhales food is not to be trusted on matters of the gut. But there's a simplistic sugariness to Star Allies that makes it easy to wolf down, even if these are empty calories.

Co-op is the focus, whether you're with human pals (you only need one Joy-Con each) or conscripting AI-controlled enemies into your squad. It's manic. With his fatal inhale and infinite jumps Kirby is overpowered at the best of times. With three chums you become a plague of locusts, stripping levels to the bone in a blur of fireballs, yoyos, and katanas. It's one of the few games where you almost feel bad for the bosses: they arrive, cackle, and are instantly consumed by rainbow death. You'll smirk, sure, and wonder how much of it you're actually responsible for.

The game's more interesting when it slows down and mixes abilities. Weapons are buffed by elemental allies, for example, while some heroes transform entirely with the right influence. Spray ice breath on a rock and it becomes a puck, capable of sliding to switches. Set a throwing star aflame and it'll carry the spark to out-of-reach bomb fuses. You can't call these puzzles – every obstacle serves up the exact enemies you'll need to overcome them – but there's a sense of cause and effect that'll enrapture younger gamers not ready for full immersive sims. The Kirbies of today are the mind-blowing Corvos of tomorrow.

Kirb Your Enthusiasm

Fun is also had with combining the gang of four in arcade setpieces where you link hands into a massive wheel or train and charge through enemy ranks. Again, if you can press a button you can survive these 'gauntlets', but as the TV fills with shattering rocks (with that satisfying buzz of HD rumble) and collectibles perfectly align with your jumping arc you are struck by the polish of it all. There's even a half-decent side-scrolling shooter in there, with the neat twist that ammo morphs based on the character in the driving seat. That's a lot of thought for segments that last maybe ten minutes of the entire game.

And that's indicative of the whole. Star Allies is a game of a thousand delightful touches. The way 'mop' Kirby's forward dash turns him into a giant floor-licking cat. Or the perfect pole-vault ping of 'rod' Kirby's down attack. Or the way 'rock' Kirby solidifies into artefacts from past games and 'painter' Kirby daubs retro sprites onto the level around him. Oh, and a shoutout for the supermarket's worth of health-restoring food pick-ups; is there anything more unashamedly videogame-y than milk cartons and corn cobs raining from the sky? If we were called 16-BitFoodMaster, this would be gold award territory.

But we aren't. Games are our, well, game, and there's no escaping that under the charming noise there's not a lot going on. Mario Odyssey has the same abundance of stuff, but it also has that perfect play for when you want to get serious. Kirby Star Allies is candyfloss – it looks massive and inviting, but dissolves when you get your teeth into it. ■

> "IT'S ONE OF THE FEW GAMES WHERE YOU ALMOST FEEL BAD FOR THE BOSSES"

Is that stupid tree boss from every Kirby game in this one too? It's a Kirby game, so yes he is.

GM LOVES...

- You can merge into a giant, fleshy steam train. Yeah.
- At its manic best, it plays like Fisher Price PlatinumGames.

GM HATES...

- OP partners turn a simple game into a total cakewalk.
- It would be nice to see the puzzle aspect pushed harder.

Better than...



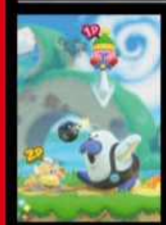
Kirby Battle Royale
This shallow multiplayer battler feels like a minigame from a larger Kirby game that's been greedily padded out into a retail release.

Worse than...



Kirby Triple Deluxe
Come for the lush use of Nintendo 3DS hardware, stay for the horrendous scene where Kirbs inhales a mile-long worm. It still gives us nightmares.

NEED TO KNOW



A short story campaign is joined by a great selection of minigames, including intergalactic baseball, a boss rush and character-specific time trials. Lots to keep you busy here.

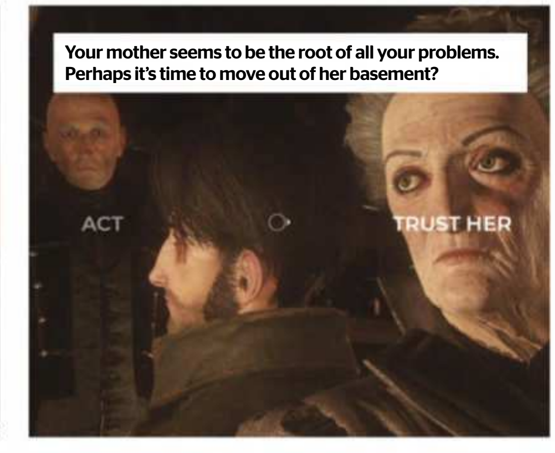
GM JUDGEMENT

73%

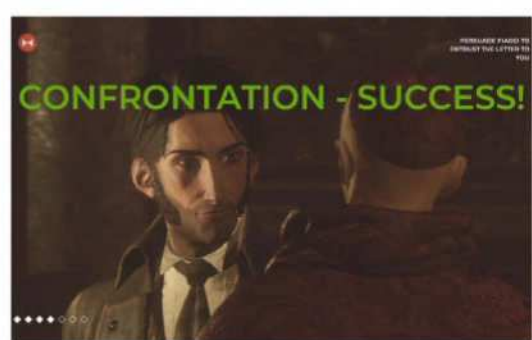


A rare kids' game that lets younger players feel badass, but the post-sugar rush crash is steep.
Matthew Castle









Format PS4, XO, PC (reviewed) **Publisher** Focus Home interactive **Developer** Big Bad Wolf **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

THE COUNCIL: EPISODE ONE – THE MAD ONES

Not a game about local planning issues



Oh dear, we've just upset a priest. A cardinal, in fact, but the sort who listens at doors while vulnerable young women are being attacked rather than intervening, so we're not that bothered about what he thinks. Even if he is rescuing people from the French revolutionary guillotine. Ah. Perhaps he's a good guy after all.

The Council's opening episode takes place during a soirée thrown by the mysterious Lord Mortimer, owner of a private island and a man with the sort of social clout to bring George Washington and Napoleon Bonaparte to his party, along with assorted aristocracy, busty duchesses, thuggish Frenchmen, and one nosy cardinal. You're there too, as Louis de Richet, a man who woke up one day tied to his own mother.

You're clearly close, but she's gone missing, and this brings you to the island. Luckily, as a high-ranking member of her secret society, you have certain skills. What they are is up to you, and they'll improve as the adventure progresses, but they allow you to investigate, manipulate, and cogitate your way around the mansion.

Talk, not stalk

There's a whiff of Dishonored about the whole thing – not that you'll be snapping any necks, but the entire cast seems made up of people who'd make Corvo's fingers itch, and the masked servants bring Lady Boyle's Last Party straight to mind. It's an impression aided by the art style, all wooden panelling, dark paintings, and faces left taut and stretched by years of cruelty. One knight in particular has a visage like a ploughed field, unsuccessfully disguised by a heavy coating of powder.

However, you're not there to kill, but to talk, using your skills to manipulate characters into being indiscreet, into handing over documents they shouldn't or giving away clues in some other way. This is how we upset the priest, opening a letter we'd sworn, unto God, that we wouldn't. Of course he found out we'd peeked. Of course he was mad. We could have spent some Effort points on opening it in such a way as he wouldn't notice, but points are precious, and you never know when you'll really need them, so we tore it open.

A few consumables allow you to top up your Effort points and clear debilitating status effects, but this is mainly a game of timing and opportunities. On-screen choices are accompanied by a ticking clock, piling on the pressure as you decide whether it was what someone said or what they're wearing that's most important. Confrontations allow you a limited number of blunders, asking you to turn someone to your way of thinking by using your skills, or by saving your Effort points and picking risky options.

This opening episode drips with quality, and drops you into a whole League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen's worth of historical figures, all jockeying for political gain and ripe for manipulation, while giving you multiple routes to success or failure. It's worth remembering, though, that it's only one episode, and keeping up the pace over a series has eluded studios in the past, but for now this narrative adventure is looking very promising. ■

> "USE YOUR SKILLS TO MANIPULATE CHARACTERS INTO BEING INDISCREET OR GIVING AWAY CLUES"

Where did Napoleon keep his armies? Up his sleevies.

GM LOVES...

- The worn, wrinkled faces are wonderfully expressive.
- Failures don't automatically mean game over.

GM HATES...

- The hero walks with all the speed of a reluctant pensioner.
- And it seems impolite to run, so we keep on walking.

Better than...



Guardians Of The Galaxy The Telltale Series
This may have had the Marvel license but The Council is so much more interesting, and has better faces.

Worse than...



Dishonored 2
Stalking the luxurious homes of the wealthy as a stone-cold killer rather than a detective adds a certain additional thrill.

NEED TO KNOW



There will be five episodes in the season. The skills you gain will carry over into other episodes, along with any facial disfigurements your character gains from confrontations – or from heroic rescues.

GM JUDGEMENT

72%



An intriguing opening for a narrative series, with some of the most raddled faces we've ever seen.
Ian Evenden

The main characters stare into the distance, wondering which nation they'll make war with next.

SPICE UP YOUR LIFE

You're not lacking in variety

Ni No Kuni II has you exploring, building a kingdom, fighting battles, cooking helpful spirits, fending off a snake man, and befriending a Welsh spirit. It is rarely dull.



Format PS4 (reviewed), PC **Publisher** Bandai Namco Entertainment **Developer** Level-5 **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

NI NO KUNI II: REVENANT KINGDOM

Now with approximately 67% more regional accents



Our boy king usurped, his loyal subjects scattered around the world, and a band of followers dead set on helping our hero bring peace to the world by uniting it under a single, newly formed, banner. Ni No Kuni II's story seems straightforward enough, but there's an underlying tension consistently dragging you out of the action.

After all, our hero who just wants peace brings it about through force. So is Ni No Kuni II actually a sharp satire on the toxicity of power and hereditary monarchy? Nope, it's a game where a Welsh fairy flicks a bogey at a die so you can cheat in a game of chance.

You take control of one Evan Pettiwhisker Tildrum, the aforementioned half-cat boy king, and a group of like-minded followers on their quest to bring peace to the world. There are, of course, roadblocks along the way: dark magic at play, parallel dimensions and... well, that's about it. Ni No Kuni II's tale isn't complex, and doesn't come close to the subtlety and tenderness of the original game. As such, it's not an auspicious start for this new kingdom.

But that issue soon fades as you lose yourself in the world presented, escaping from a coup d'état in your home city of Ding Dong Dell thanks to the help of Roland, who teleports in from another world for... *reasons*. Almost immediately you're thrust into the world map and are told to get out and meet new people – and this is where Ni No Kuni II makes up for its lacking narrative. The translation is superb, full of wit and playful language – more puns than you could ever carry – and characters that are both memorable and enjoyable to engage with. Apart from Long Mein. Nobody likes Long Mein.

"IT'S A GAME WHERE A WELSH FAIRY FLICKS A BOGEY AT A DIE SO YOU CAN CHEAT IN A GAME OF CHANCE"

Help me, I am in Hull

You'll be meeting these characters in some imaginative realms both inside and outside city walls, dashing through magical forests, exposing corruption in a casino city where trials are decided on the roll of a die, having underwear-sporting Yorkshirefolk build a boat for you – they literally live in a place called Hull. It's a journey of discovery, never



WITH OR WITHOUT GHIBLETS

No master animators: so no fun?

Studio Ghibli rather famously co-produced the original Ni No Kuni, but this time around there's no involvement from the Japanese animation masters. So what does that mean for the game?

Well, the studio's absence is felt. It's hard to nail down, but there's a sense of *lacking* throughout Ni No Kuni II – both in a crafted, heartfelt story tying everything together, and in how sometimes it feels a bit *cheap*. The original featured a bewitching fairy tale, as smart as it was heartfelt, as well as lavish cut scenes – basically, the Ghibli factor. The sequel... not so much. And, of course, the warmongering you do doesn't fit in with the studio's peaceful ethos. There are some Ghibli-ish character designs, at least.

With six main characters and only three slots for each battle, you won't always get to use everyone in every fight.

Combat is free-flowing, fast and fun – though it can be overwhelming at times, and your AI partners can sometimes stall, offering no help at all.

You can take up to four Higgledies into battle, each helping out in different ways. Pick carefully and level them up as these little spirits can be handy.

As well as plenty of main missions, Ni No Kuni II features dozens – hundreds, even – of side quests, some of which can reveal important plot information.

leaving you disappointed with who you encounter. Which is good, because that story really isn't much, and Ni No Kuni II possesses one of gaming's Great Poor Endings – you have been warned.

Much as there is a focus on the world and its characters, Ni No Kuni II is also a game very much of its systems – and systems it has by the ton. Exploration is one facet: you will meet new people and see new places, and be rewarded for your discoveries, but you're always kept on the path by levelled enemies who funnel you into the 'right' places as you progress. Said progression comes from a traditional XP system and combat that is virtually the same as in the Tales series.

While the original Ni No Kuni featured a hybrid turn-based system and was very good indeed, the sequel opts for real-time button mashing with the illusion of strategy layered over it. Maybe that's a bit harsh, but the simplicity of the system will be a bit of a letdown for those who want to imbue their battling with more strategy. Two members of your team are AI-controlled, and you can edit their behaviours and tactics so there is a bit of thought involved, but generally speaking it's all a bit *simple*. Having said that, there's no denying the satisfaction that comes from almost every battle, with slashes and magic and leaps and dashes lending an intoxicating rhythm to combat – you'll want to do it.



And do it repeatedly you will, with little regard for your own safety – in the most part because Ni No Kuni II is very easy, especially with a team of Higgledies by your side. These little spirits offer boosts and buffs to your team as you battle, launching cannonballs, healing, and providing other match-winning perks. Honestly, it's not a difficult game to begin with, and when you pay attention to your helpers it becomes almost insultingly simple, with bosses 20 levels ahead of your party dispatched with ease.

Cat's entertainment

So why put time in to something that offers a weak story and simple combat? Well, aside from that brilliant translation work and characterisation, there's the Other Stuff. Ni No Kuni II layers systems on top of systems, with systems hidden around the sides for good measure. None of them would make great games in their own right, but it doesn't matter because you're getting them all in one package, and a bit of one followed by the other is both satisfying and enjoyable.

First up you have your city builder elements, which brings together mechanics like those seen in the classic RPG series Suikoden. Basically you build your kingdom, the town of Evermore, placing and upgrading buildings, sourcing new citizens and putting them to work as you see fit, using your new sources of income to improve your party, the weapons you have available and the spells you can throw (among other things), generally operating an engine that keeps your main party of six characters up and running. It's not Cities: Skylines, sure, but it is fun and you'll find yourself engaging in a fair bit of micromanagement *by choice*.

You'll also find elements such as large-scale battles – remember what we said about bringing peace by force? These take the form of an RTS-lite game, with rock-paper-scissors mechanics and a lot of fights. It's not as engaging as the city building, but it is fun. You also have the management of your Higgledies: you feed them, level them up, improve their stats or just cook up a new batch. And yes, they are literally cooked up. It's another distraction that takes up far more time than you might expect.

Ni No Kuni II is, at times, brilliant – few players will resent it for eating up as much free time as it is capable of doing. And yet, the underlying issues, the way it throws *content* at you hoping you don't notice the sloppy story, the feeling that this is a game riding on the coat tails of the original… it brings it down. Not quite with a crash, but enough that we can't recommend it nearly as much as we did its precursor. And, for those keeping score, Drippy the Welsh fairy is far more entertaining than Lofty the Welsh fairy. ■

GM LOVES...

- From start to finish, it all looks great. Its pedigree shows.
- The translation is stellar, and provides plenty of laughs.

GM HATES...

- Overcomplicates things while remaining way too simplistic.
- You really feel the lack of Studio Ghibli's involvement.

Better than...



Tales Of Berseria
NNKII closely emulates the Tales series in many ways, but it does manage to feel slightly better than the latest game in the series. Just.

Worse than...



Ni No Kuni: Wrath Of The White Witch
The original game nails the magic, atmosphere, and challenge elements. Plus Drippy is better than Lofty.

NEED TO KNOW



Grinding isn't necessary for the first half to two-thirds of the game. Once it is, we'd recommend seeking out the monsters with purple auras for some speed levelling. If you can beat them.

GM JUDGEMENT





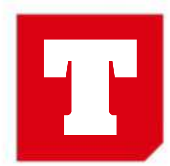
A satisfying timesink, with some enjoyable elements, let down by a complete lack of challenge.
Ian Dransfield



Format XO (reviewed), PC **Publisher** Microsoft **Developer** Rare
ETA Out now **Players** MMO

SEA OF THIEVES

Aaaaaaaaarrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr you going my way?



The idea of a game devoted entirely to the swashing of buckles, the shivering of timbers, and the acquiring of pieces of eight is a jolly rogering appealing one. And yet judging how successfully the idea has been implemented here is surprisingly difficult. This game is a beautiful monster; it will lure you in like an impossibly beautiful siren, and reward your curiosity with laughs and love. Until, that is, it turns on you with more speed and ferocity than a crew when all the grog has gone. There's loads of fun to be had, but you'll be sailing some rough seas, that's for sure.

Whether you're bootying up the game for the first time or the hundredth, you'll need to choose the size of your ship and crew before you can set sail. There's a large ship (a galleon) designed for a full crew of four, or a much smaller boat (a sloop) that can be easily handled solo or with a single crewmate. With this choice made, you can dive straight into matchmaking alone or with friends to start/resume your life as a pirate.

It's worth lingering over the choice of vessel, as this will affect the experience significantly. It's best to choose a galleon most of the time; a sloop has a tighter turning circle, but the advantages pretty much end there. A galleon is much harder to sink, is little slower than a sloop (if at all), and carries eight cannons rather than just two. The advantages of a full crew are more complex, and something we'll explore shortly.

The pirate bae

Being a pirate is only partly about what you do. The other 80% is, of course, about how you *look*. Sea Of Thieves is a little disappointing in this regard, the first sign of troubled waters. The selection of character models is limited, but that's not the problem. Nor is the fact that you start off with little more than a small choice of haircuts and a pair of pants. The problem is that all of the glorious piratical paraphernalia on sale – peg legs, luscious jackets, different coloured sails, all sorts of customisation items – are almost exclusively extraordinarily expensive… and gold, especially to begin with, is earned at a glacial rate.

> **"ALL OF THE GLORIOUS PIRATICAL PARAPHERNALIA – PEG LEGS, LUSCIOUS JACKETS – IS EXPENSIVE"**

GM CERTIFIED 100% INDEPENDENT REVIEWS SINCE 1993

The reasoning behind this is clear. With no campaign/story, one of the main objectives is to earn and loot gold. This is primarily done by completing "voyages" for the game's three factions. The Gold Hoarders task you with finding and returning treasure chests, the Merchants ask you to find and deliver animals/items to specific areas, and the Order Of Souls orders you to find and defeat skeletal pirate crews, and retrieve the skulls of their captains.

You can carry three voyage scrolls at once. Any member of the crew can propose one of their voyages in the captain's cabin, but only the one with the most votes will be set as the next

Why was the pirate so good at writing songs? He always had a great hook.



OH, THE HOKEY POKEY

Don't be afraid to prod and poke things (in game)

You can turn lanterns on and off! Good to know at night. There's no need to make your crew and your ship easy targets for rivals.

On islands, keep an eye out for barrels like this. They often contain useful supplies, including bananas – handy if you're low on health.

Barrels in your ship's hold contain planks for repair, bananas for health, and – like these ones – cannonballs. Remember to fill as well as empty them.

Defeated skeleton captains drop a glowing skull. Pick it up, and sell it to the Order Of Souls to complete your voyage and get rewarded!

DIE, YE DOG!

The most appealing thing about combat is sword fighting with other players, but what usually happens is one of you will kill the other with a blunderbuss in a few shots. Fortunately, AI opponents fill in this particular gap.



The Kraken can't use swords, but it doesn't really need to. Man the cannons lads, and get ready for calamari!



Skeletons will use both swords and guns when fighting you. Beware; they know how to block and flank.



Skeleton captains take more hits than their underlings, but aren't any smarter. Still, be careful nonetheless.

objective. While going it alone in a sloop gives you control over where you go and what you do, the experience has – for better and for worse – been designed around interacting with other players.

Shiver me timbre

Voice chat is Rare's preferred method for scurvy dogs to talk to one another, and it's certainly the quickest and easiest way to communicate (plus it affords an opportunity to infuriate the neighbours by talking in a loud pirate voice). If you can't/won't use a mic, don't worry; most people don't. There's a dialogue wheel with pre-programmed phrases which works very well. This includes contextual options depending on what you're doing. You can let your crew know when you're carrying something or if you're left behind in the water, warn others of a ship while holding a telescope, and so on.

"IT HAS – FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE – BEEN DESIGNED AROUND INTERACTING WITH OTHER PLAYERS"

Effective communication is essential to the experience, especially on a galleon. Never is this made more obvious to us than when we stray into a storm. Fighting a wheel which has suddenly gained a life of its own, we look in panic at the compass, which has been rendered useless, thrown into a constant spin. In desperation, we shout for a compass bearing; a crewmate at the map table obliges. Meanwhile, the other two members of our crew are hammering planks over holes and bailing out water, the storm having torn ruthlessly at our ship. We carry on like this for a few more minutes until we emerge under clear blue skies. Relieved, we congratulate one another on a job well done.

It's memorable moments like this, rather than reading treasure maps and fighting the undead, that make up the 'real' game. We think also of the time when we were part of a hapless crew that beached a galleon at speed. Rather than trade insults, everybody thought this was hilarious (which it was). Yet another time, we were playing with a friend in a sloop, thinking we were clever using our turning circle advantage to keep a small island between us and a chasing galleon; until we found out the hard way that, fed up with our circular shenanigans, they had snuck a crewman onto the island – who then boarded and killed us.

At its best moments, Sea Of Thieves is a fantastic experience that you never want to end, and can even be a way of making new friends. By drinking so deeply from the poisoned chalice of the internet, however, Rare has invited some unpleasant side effects. As a game that demands an internet connection, if there's a problem with the servers – or your internet – it won't work properly, or perhaps won't work at all. If/when said servers go down for maintenance, you won't be able to play at all.

The problems aren't purely technical. The onus is arguably placed a little *too* heavily on the players to provide the fun. This is more of a playground than a videogame. A playground isn't as much



Sea it all
You'll see the sea a *lot*. Don't knock it, people pay loads for a home or hotel room with this sort of view. Much, if not most, of your time will be spent on your ship travelling between islands rather than adventuring on them, so it's just as well that the sea looks amazing. Go for a paddle; it's like being at Weymouth, only everybody's out to kill you, instead of just the seagulls.

Perpetual emotion
There's an emote wheel as well as a dialogue one. You can clap, point (but don't do that, it's rude), and more ways to show how you're feeling without words. You don't have to use it for other people's benefit; take advantage of emotes for your makeshift holiday! Here for example, we're having a nap after a hard day. Don't we look cute?

Aaand... scenery!
No holiday is complete without a bit of sightseeing, and there are plenty of sights to see here. The bright colours and attractive cartoony art make each island really pop, from the dullest rock to the greenest mini-paradise. Lazy? Of course you are. Use your telescope to appreciate them from far away! Are you enjoying your holiday?

Better than you fort
The more active holidaymaker is well catered for. Yes, there's all the avoiding and fighting other pirates, digging up treasure, etc etc. If you're after a low-pressure experience, fire yourself out of a cannon into the nearest fort, and explore to your heart's content. Chase the chickens and pigs (but run away from the skeletons).



fun on your own as it is with others. And, like any playground, it has bullies. Voting crew members into the brig, trapping them there until they're voted out again, was meant to be a defence against griefing – but it's being abused more widely than we'd like (and griefers can simply quit and torment a new crew). Our friend was thrown into the brig within seconds of his first game, instantly killing his enthusiasm. On another occasion, after our crew of three spent much hard work finding and catching chickens for a voyage, a griefer joined. He then grabbed one of our feathered packages, and refused to put it down until time had expired and we failed the mission.

Poop deck
Experiences like this are disheartening, especially considering the fact that a voyage can take anything from ten minutes to an hour, *and* you can't claim your rewards until you've returned your loot to an outpost. Fortunately, they're fairly rare. Most of the community is helpful and good-humoured. We didn't even mind the times that we were on a ship sunk by rival pirates, or the times we were killed (although losing loot is painful).

Despite some avoidable pitfalls, a lot has been done right. It's a gorgeous-looking game, and the controls and systems are simple (although, bafflingly, very poorly explained). Advancement means new cosmetic items and more complex voyages, not more power, so you never need to worry about fighting a pirate with more health or a more powerful weapon. It's also pretty cool that one member of your crew might be able to offer a voyage you won't unlock yourself for another dozen hours or more, something we expect to see more of as time goes on.

The fun's largely determined by people's behaviour, including yours. So always remember: don't be an anchor. ■

GM LOVES...
- With the right crew, simply sailing along is a joy.
- It's designed to encourage friendliness and co-operation.

GM HATES...
- There's nothing to effectively punish or avoid griefers.
- Players are expected to generate most of the fun themselves.

Better than...


Raven's Cry
How on Earth could a game with pirates in it be so bad? Play this legendarily poor action adventure, and you'll soon find out.

Worse than...


GTA Online
One of the very best examples of how to do a shared online world, which is fun even for solo players. A classic, popular to this day.

NEED TO KNOW


Wrecked your ship, or crew accidentally left you behind? Don't panic! A mermaid will appear to teleport you to deck, or a new ship, as appropriate. Just like real pirates used to have.

GM JUDGEMENT
72%



There's solid gold to be found here... but so, sadly, is betrayal. Getting the right team is crew-tial.
Luke Kemp

Vincent (left) is the uptight one; Leo (right) is the wild child. And that's about as far as their characterisation goes.

Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC **Publisher** EA **Developer** Hazelight Studios **ETA** Out now **Players** 2

A WAY OUT

A little less con-versation, a little more action please...

This new title from the creator of Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons is another two-man story-driven adventure, but A Way Out places control firmly in the hands of two separate players. Each takes the role of a prisoner, and the two are forced to work together to escape. It's split-screen, but not in the traditional sense – even online players will see each other's viewpoint, and in several sequences the split changes proportions to suit the moment. It tests players' ability to communicate through a series of co-op themed puzzles and moments when they must mutally agree on a course of action through the story.

To best rate this experience we decided we should get into the spirit of the game and do a joint review between editor Robin Valentine and staff writer Sam Greer. Which one is the uptight professional and which the loose cannon? You decide!

Sam: For a game pitched as something akin to The Shawshank Redemption, a small-scale drama about two prisoners bonding despite their differences, I'm left pretty stunned that the end result is actually closer to the bombastic Army Of Two. Which, given the publisher, maybe isn't a surprise. There's fun in that, and I certainly enjoyed my time with the game but I don't think this is what people were expecting at all. And maybe it's not what the developer was aiming for?

Robin: It certainly feels like it's trying to do something very serious and profound with its prison-break-meets-revenge-thriller story, and given the emotional heft of the studio's previous game, I was totally willing to believe it'd pull it off. But A Way Out just undermines that idea at every turn. The escalating over-the-top action is partly to blame, but long before that comes into play the absolutely dreadful dialogue has already utterly hamstrung the story and characters.

> "NOVELTY IS THE NAME OF THE GAME, WITH EVERY HIGH-OCTANE SETPIECE IMPRESSIVELY UNIQUE"

Shawshonk Redemption

Sam: Oh god yes. The dialogue! Everything is written as if the writer had human interaction described to them by one of those rudimentary AIs people use to generate daft film scripts online. Every line follows a painful formula where everyone states the obvious. It's so wooden and completely daft, to the point we started laughing at every conversation. Which does give the game some unintentional comedy value but it certainly does the story no favours. The action around it is definitely over the top, but easily the highlight of the game, especially as it escalates into the absurd

Robin: And wow, does it escalate. I think a lot of people will be expecting something subdued and subtle, but this is far more in the realm of Uncharted – it has its quiet moments, but it's not short of explosions, shootouts, and ridiculous car chases either. It's to the game's credit



ALLOCATED LEISURE TIME

Minigames to look out for

As you wander around the world of A Way Out, on the run from the police, it can be easy to get caught up in the escape and overlook a lot of neat incidental stuff in the environment.

You really *ought* to stop and look around often because there are loads of little minigames about for both players to enjoy. There's simple stuff like Connect Four, arcade games, and so on to compete at, but there's also the chance to do stranger things, such as duet on a piano and banjo. Why? Because you can. None of it makes any sense in context but it is a lot of fun.





The game's setpieces are surprisingly spectacular and beautiful, despite its relatively modest budget.





One scene sees one player distracting a nurse while the other sneaks around behind her.



MULTIPLE CHOICE

Shallow decisions abound

While A Way Out has a large bag of tricks, you'll find few are recurring, apart from the frequent inclusion of branching-path choices, which come up during cutscenes.

At these points players are offered two options, one offered up by the hotheaded Leo, and the other by the cautious Vincent. You're faced with decisions such as whether to steal a car to crash through a police barricade, or sneak under a bridge instead. Both players must agree on the choice for it to happen. In theory this is an opportunity for the dev to flesh out the characters, to tell us what kind of people they are – what will they do, what won't they do, and how these two people differ. Sadly, though, thanks to some sloppy plotting, this falls flat. Vincent always provides the cool, smart, level-headed choice, while Leo always proposes something blatantly stupid. As a result we found ourselves constantly picking Vincent's options because they were clearly the sensible choices. As a result there's no real tension to these moments, and certainly no attempt to surprise us with fresh insight into the characters. Worse, they make Leo seem like an absolute buffoon for the entire game, always jumping to the most reckless idea possible.

The best branching choices, such as those in The Witcher, offer players options that are equally plausible, to make us sweat a little and engage with the drama. A Way Out's approach is clunkier, and, as a result, far less interesting than it could be.

that it doesn't come out badly from the comparison, though. For a smaller budget game it's frequently spectacular, and unlike its AAA competitors, it never repeats itself. Novelty is the name of the game here, with every high-octane setpiece impressively unique.

Sam: The action really is the star of the experience – it's far better than we'd dared hope. Each setpiece has a really impressive amount of polish that elevates it from a mere minigame. It's just a shame that the quieter and dramatic moments end up falling so flat, because there's a missed opportunity here for something more interesting. You get hints of this potential at points, such as visiting one character's family at a trailer park, where there are lot of little things to see and interact with that aren't action. You can imagine a game that does more with the human drama and that just would've been far more compelling.

Robin: Weirdly, some of its best moments come when you totally ignore the serious scene it's trying to show you, and just mess about in the background. The activities opened up to you are often pretty incongruous – 'the police are closing in, have we got time for a round of horseshoes?' – but they help make each area its own little sandbox. I had great fun just poking around, both together and apart.

The hard cell

Sam: The detail in the environments is a welcome surprise, even if it makes no sense. Ignoring the serious drama really is the only way to go, especially as the game's plot reaches its climax. Not even the most generous of players could possibly take the final chapters of the game seriously – which really is for the best, because the sillier it gets, the more fun it actually becomes. The over-the-top chase scenes, on foot, in vehicles, and at one point even in a rowboat, are particularly a lot of fun, especially since each one is so distinct from the rest. The game uses novelty so well.

Robin: Ultimately, I'm left conflicted about A Way Out. As you say, it's good fun, but it's so much less than I was hoping it would be. Off the back of Brothers, I expected a heart-wrenching drama. Instead, it's more like a straight-to-DVD action movie, a good laugh with a mate but incapable of generating any real emotional investment. Its over-the-top setpieces are spectacular enough, but nothing new; its quieter moments are more intriguing and distinctive, but ultimately struggle to have an impact when you don't care about the characters. And when it ultimately tries to tug hard at your heartstrings, that lack of groundwork ensures it falls utterly flat, my eyes rolling rather than filling with tears. As a bit of popcorn entertainment over a few evenings with a like-minded mate, it's easy to recommend, but it should have been so much more.

Sam: There's plenty enough to enjoy for sure, with great action and clever co-op mechanics. In terms of the interaction between players there's a lot that put a smile on my face. But sadly I agree that it just fails to deliver on the promises littered throughout for a co-op-driven narrative drama. That would have been something unique and very special for a videogame. Instead what we've got is genuinely fun but pretty dumb and action-driven. A bit like myself.

Robin: Damnit Sam, I told you to do this review by the book! ■

Best minigame? Both Sam and Robin have a soft spot for volleyball-esque arcade game Grenade Brothers.

GM LOVES...

- It's got loads of clever and novel ideas for co-op action.
- Its detailed sandboxes are a pleasure to explore.

GM HATES...

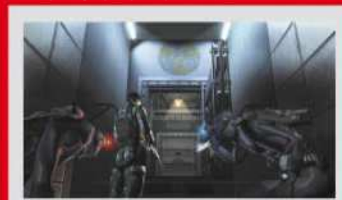
- The unbearably bad dialogue totally sinks the story.
- Over the top moments, while fun, undermine the drama.

Better than...



Army Of Two
While we miss the air guitar (a banjo just isn't the same) and customisable face masks, A Way Out is undoubtedly a higher-quality co-op game.

Worse than...



Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory
A Way Out has some great ideas but it just doesn't come together as well as Splinter Cell's classic co-op title.

NEED TO KNOW



Though the game has mandatory co-op, you and your friend only need one copy of the game to play online together. The owner of the game can gift a pass to their friend. It's a really nice touch.

GM JUDGEMENT



72%



A novel adventure that fails to deliver on its dramatic aspirations.
Sam Greer/ Robin Valentine



So much of Ghost Of A Tale's world-building takes place through song, and it expects you to provide the vocals.

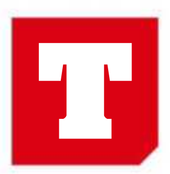




Format PS4, XO, PC (reviewed) **Publisher** SeithCG **Developer** SeithCG **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

GHOST OF A TALE

'Tail' was right there, guys



This newest project from Lionel 'Seith' Gallat – previously known for his work on big-budget animated features such as Shark Tale – is a classic adventure of a timid rodent discovering his own strength and courage. It's utterly charming, but for all its polish, Ghost Of A Tale just isn't much fun to play.

Tilo is one of the best looking and most beautifully animated videogame heroes in years, all twitchy ears and dainty reaches. An obsessive level of polish shows in every move he makes. From the most desperate clamber to the idlest glance, he shows his personality entirely through gesture. This level of care goes beyond our hero – smug slouches, shifty fidgets, and stumbling footsteps all define the denizens of Dwindling Heights in an instant. Gallat's background in animated movies shows most clearly in this expressive cast.

It's a shame that there's no voice acting, then. There's certainly plenty of delightful writing, even if things start a little rockily with some hefty lore dumps. But as funny and sincere as the dialogue can be, text boxes feel glaringly cheap against the lifelike animation. Worst of all, Tilo is a bard who can't sing. He's never without his lute, and often characters request songs. You have a book to pick through, and music begins to play – but you'll never hear anything from our mouse minstrel's mouth.

A mice place to visit

The castle of Dwindling Heights might be quiet, but it's a lovely space to scurry around. Like its inhabitants, the unkempt keep has a handcrafted feel. Daylight bounces off the crumbling stone in the courtyard; nettles and grass wave in the breeze in the surrounding forest. While the world is limited in scope, years of careful craft have paid off. Combined with the stunningly realised rodents, it frequently looks more like a Dreamworks film than a videogame.

With so much work put into the world, it's perfect that so much of Ghost Of A Tale is about slowly picking it apart. There's more than a little Lordran here. Exploration and lateral thinking opens up hidden passages and basket elevators, and dungeon puzzles keep you busy.

Unfortunately, much of the moment-to-moment play is a chore. There's a handful of great quests that make use of the day/night cycle, but these are drowned out by dozens of tedious fetch-quests. Dwindling Heights is littered with stuff. When you come across a new rock or bug, you think about what possibilities it might unlock. "Who'll be wanting 30 of these in a couple of hours?" you wonder. When an alchemist asks us to pick a three-page list of mushrooms, we feel like giving up.

Stealth, too, quickly becomes a chore. While you have options to disguise yourself down the line, tools are limited to sticks, bottles, and slime – Tilo's more Stuart Little than Solid Snake. Detection is a predictable line-of-sight affair, and evasion is simply a matter of rounding a corner, jumping into a barrel and waiting. It's tedious, and the sole alert track becomes really repetitive, really fast.

Ghost Of A Tale is charming, and brings cinematic flair to the smallest detail. But between busywork and dated design, this house isn't fit for a mouse. ■

> "IT'S OFTEN HARD TO REMEMBER THAT YOU'RE LOOKING AT A GAME AND NOT AN ANIMATED FILM"

What's the range of cheese like in Ghost Of A Tale? Brie warned, it isn't very gouda

GM LOVES...

- The animations are gorgeous – worthy of a film.
- The traps, treasure, and secrets will keep you busy for hours.

GM HATES...

- Dated quest design and overly simple mechanics are a chore.
- The lack of vocals makes for quite a barren audio experience.

Better than...



Styx: Shards Of Darkness
Styx might be the better sneak-'em-up, but snarky referential humour can't hold a candle to Tilo's charm.

Worse than...



Moss
A charming PS VR storybook of mice and magic, Moss manages to find a far more modern approach to rodent-based puzzling adventures.

NEED TO KNOW



Tilo can pick up new pieces of clothing scattered throughout, from bandit to buccaneer outfits. Each grants unique interactions; disguising Tilo as a guard comes in handy in a pinch.

GM JUDGEMENT

71%



A stunning world of beautifully animated characters, let down by dated design and limited resources.
Natalie Clayton

The Ravenii's feet are very vulnerable, especially if they've forgotten to put their armour on that morning.

Format PS4, XO, PC (reviewed) **Publisher** Modus Games **Developer** Iron Galaxy **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

EXTINCTION

They're green, they're mean, you can stab them in the spleen



We're quite keen on Shadow Of The Colossus here, as you may have noticed recently. So when another game comes along that offers the chance to climb enormous monsters but, this time, chop off their limbs and decapitate them, we're interested. The devs at Iron Galaxy have decided the eerie loneliness of SOTC isn't for them, however, and have stuffed the game with things to hit and climb.

And they've done it in the most generic way possible. Yes, with orcs – or maybe, because they're so big, ogres. Big, green (later red), angry, and stompy, but called Ravenii, they're Thor: Ragnarok's Hulk without the charisma. They've got little friends too, Jackals and their flying, gargoyle-like buddies the Vultures, who make a nuisance of themselves slaughtering the populations of cities while the big guys smash down buildings around them.

Happily, you can do something about this. As Avil, a rugged young man who likes to tell people he's the 'last of the Sentinels', you can leap, dodge, and chop your way around the cities, killing Jackals, rescuing civilians and taking down Ravenii. Avil's got upgradable skills, a combo system and a Rune Strike super-attack that's charged by killing and rescuing, and it's this that lets him chop off Ravenii limbs.

He got better

'Tis but a flesh wound, however, and the Ravenii regenerate distressingly quickly, the new arm or leg forming out of thin air and green energy rather than growing back slowly. Things get more complicated if a Ravenii is wearing armour, as you must bash this off before tackling the limb, and some armour is locked on, so the lock needs to be smashed – sometimes twice. Levels fall into a pattern: you run around for a bit rescuing people, killing Jackals, and charging your Rune Strike, then head straight for the big green chap and, when you're close enough, hold the left trigger to slow time. This targets the Rune Strike, and as long as you're close enough vulnerable areas glow orange. Release the trigger while pointing at an orange bit and the strike is executed – a lock is removed, some armour falls apart, a limb is chopped off.

> "BIG, GREEN, ANGRY, AND STOMPY, THE RAVENII ARE THOR: RAGNAROK'S HULK WITHOUT THE CHARISMA"

One particularly infuriating early Ravenii has a padlock on the front of his helmet, which must be removed before he can be finished off, and it's here the game reveals its obsession with keeping you airborne. If jumping isn't to your taste, get the Ravenii down on the ground by removing his leg and you can climb him, then chop off his arms and he can't attack you. Smash off his helmet and your next Rune Strike can decapitate him, bringing the level to a close. Just do it quickly before his limbs grow back, as he's quite capable of swatting you like an ant while you're crawling on his shoulders. The game tries to mix the giant-fighting up a bit by imposing conditions, such as killing a Ravenii while both his legs are intact, or saving a certain number of civilians, and the



THAT'S RANDOM

The future isn't fixed

Some levels are randomly generated, and a common tactic for increasing replayability is to send several Ravenii into an area, tasking you with killing a certain number before the city is destroyed.

As the game progresses Ravenii come in groups or with more elaborate armour or weapons, but taking them out always requires exactly the same thing – you have to remove locks, remove armour, charge Rune Strike, and finally decapitate. Crowds of Jackals running at their feet are a pain if you've got to protect civilians, but taking down the big guys is generally the key to successfully completing a level.




Rescuing civilians means holding your hands up to a crystal for a few seconds so they're sucked through a portal.


There's a fair amount of splatter when you catch a Jackal with a combo strike, but they're resilient foes nonetheless.

expectation is you'll replay levels until you've ticked all the boxes, but this does little to disguise the repetitive nature of what you're doing.

There's only one attack button, and the combo system builds on this by requiring timed presses, with gaps between, to pull off spectacular sword attacks. It reminds us of rhythm games such as Patapon as much as Ninja Theory's Devil May Cry reboot or Iron Galaxy's previous work on Killer Instinct, but lifting your thumb off for a beat before getting stuck back into the mash makes combos a thrill – as long as you can remember the rhythms.

Beat combo

Along with his sword, Avil has a whip he can hook into clearly marked points on buildings and Ravenii, enabling him to pull himself into the air and move much faster. He can also climb man-made structures with taps of a button, and while his slow run makes traversal of the imperilled cities a plodding affair, the ability to launch him skyward is welcome, and when mixed with upgraded jumping skills can propel him like a Rocket League car. He need never touch the ground as he makes huge leaps, smashing off multiple pieces of armour with Rune Strikes before grappling onto a nearby building, swinging up again, and landing on the Ravenii's shoulders ready to land the killer blow.

Doing that takes control, and this reveals one of Extinction's problems. The time-slowing effect of the Rune Strike is all very well, but it just means you see a giant green hand move ponderously into position to slap you while you struggle with the targeting reticule. Avil, it seems, doesn't like to strike at things above him, even though that's where most of the Ravenii are – the game would rather you were in the air. You know you're close enough, you pull the trigger, you pull back on the stick to target a padlock above your head and… nothing. Then you get stomped. Elsewhere, Jackals can attack you from off-screen, interrupting the combos which are vital to taking down the tougher breeds.

It's infuriating, but there are more annoyances too. Sound clips repeat over and over, Avil musing to himself that he needs to hit the weak spots when they're glowing. Yes, we got that thank you. And no, perky female companion, that Jackal didn't 'almost get us' no matter how many times you say it. Bringing action games into 2018 doesn't just mean raising the resolution to a pleasing 4K, but using the Unreal Engine to create a world in which the ground isn't pancake flat except for rocky outcrops that can't be climbed (apart from the handy ladders made of vines, of course) and in which enemies don't just spawn conveniently in front of you, no matter how much you try to cover this with backstory about magic portals.

This is design from the PS2 era stretched thinly over a modern game, and it's not even the best design from that bygone time. There's nothing here we haven't seen before, once the novelty of the giant Ravenii has worn off, and any comparison to Shadow Of The Colossus is shown to be simply incorrect. This is a pure brawler, not a thoughtful puzzler with violence, and there's no sense of regret to be felt once you've felled one of these great beasts. Extinction is full of colourful button-bashy, combo-triggering fun, but it lacks depth and longevity, as the realisation of how repetitive the game is sets in early and never really leaves. ■

What's big, green, and sings? Elvis Parsley

GM LOVES...

- The size of the Ravenii is certainly a spectacle.
- Comboing your way through Jackals is satisfying.

GM HATES...

- There are control issues when trying to lop off limbs.
- Repetition soon sets in – each level feels pretty much the same.

Better than...



Dynasty Warriors 9
Koei Tecmo's open-world 3D brawler is ambitious – you can cross China! – but, being far too easy, falls into the same repetitive trap as Extinction.

Worse than...



DMC
If you want a combo system, this is the one to have. Ninja Theory reinvented the character action game wheel with serious craftsmanship here.

NEED TO KNOW



Game modes in addition to the campaign are Extinction – a horde mode – and Skirmish, which sees you create scenarios, set victory conditions, and challenge other players online.

GM JUDGEMENT





A whole lot of colour and fun, with big things to smash, but it becomes repetitive far too quickly.
Ian Evenden

GM

Review

The Final Verdict!

NOW PLAYING

This month's biggest time sinks on Team GM



1 STELLARIS PC

Thanks to the latest patch, I've been sucked in all over again. My latest empire just got evolutionarily regressed by a retrovirus and is now at war with cyclopses. So all going well.
Robin Valentine, editor



2 ASSASSIN'S CREED ORIGINS PS4

It's rare that I keep playing a game after the credits have rolled, but the open world Ubisoft built here is just too beautiful to stop exploring.
Robin Valentine, editor



3 INJUSTICE 2 PS4

I'm not a fan of Superman or Batman or any of those superheroes, but give me a chance to beat them up as the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and I'm in all the way.
Sam Greer, staff writer



4 MONSTER HUNTER WORLD PS4

Still hunting. Mustn't stop. There's always another monster. Need their hides for my new outfit. Must hunt.
Sam Greer, staff writer



OFFICE LUNCHTIME GAME OF THE MONTH: SCRIBBLENAUTS SHOWDOWN PS4

We've started our own fight club in the sandbox mode. The headline bout this month: mutant god versus super cop.



The hackers' foes include a Fox News analogue and a fictional North African dictator.

Format PC (reviewed), Mobile **Pub** Eko **Dev** Eko **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

#WARGAMES

Shall we play a TV show?



Following 2015's excellent Her Story, it was hard not to have high expectations for this latest project from developer Sam Barlow. Unfortunately, while #WarGames shares that game's experimental spirit and live action focus, it doesn't feel anywhere near as revolutionary

Perhaps better dubbed 'interactive media' rather than a game in the traditional sense, it's essentially a TV show where you choose the focus. The plot concerns a group of activist hackers – inspired both in-universe and out by the 1983 Matthew Broderick film – working against the establishment. The action takes place exclusively across multiple computer windows, from video calls to surveillance footage to web pages, and as things play out you're able to click around to whichever you're most interested in at that moment.

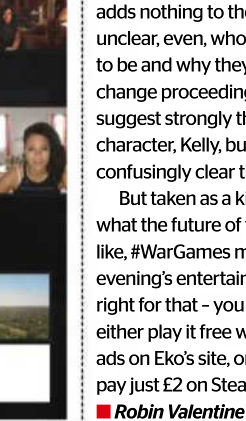
Tech control

It's certainly a timely approach – in an era of second screens and limited attention spans, it feels oddly natural to be able to flit between windows as different moments and characters catch your eye. As an experiment in the medium, then, it's an interesting one. But both as a story and as a game, it falters.

The plot, while initially engaging enough, is thin and brief. It's got its fair share of big ideas, and even some endearing, well-performed characters, but over the course of its 95-minute run time, it struggles to find space to develop any of them fully, and ultimately ends up feeling like an introduction to something larger, rather than the complete 'season' it bills itself as.

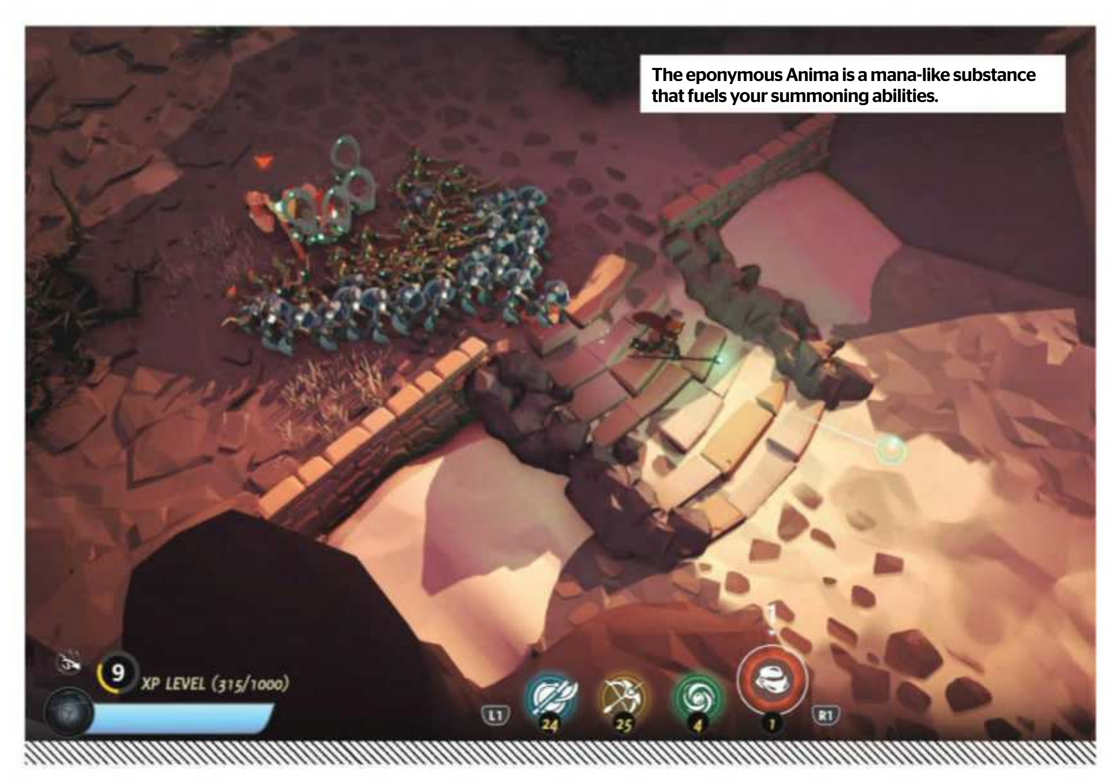
And the interactivity here is minimal. The game promises that the story is actually affected by your viewing habits, but with no feedback to tell you how or when you've made a 'choice', it really adds nothing to the experience. It's unclear, even, who the player is supposed to be and why they would be able to change proceedings – some scenes suggest strongly that you're the main character, Kelly, but others make it confusingly clear that you can't be.

But taken as a kind of tech demo of what the future of television could look like, #WarGames makes for an intriguing evening's entertainment. And it's priced right for that – you can either play it free with ads on Eko's site, or pay just £2 on Steam.
■ *Robin Valentine*





The hacking is kept realistic – or, at least, believable enough to us print-bound luddites.



The eponymous Anima is a mana-like substance that fuels your summoning abilities.

Format Switch, PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC **Pub** Focus Home Interactive **Dev** Passtech Games **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

MASTERS OF ANIMA

The wonderful wizard of wars

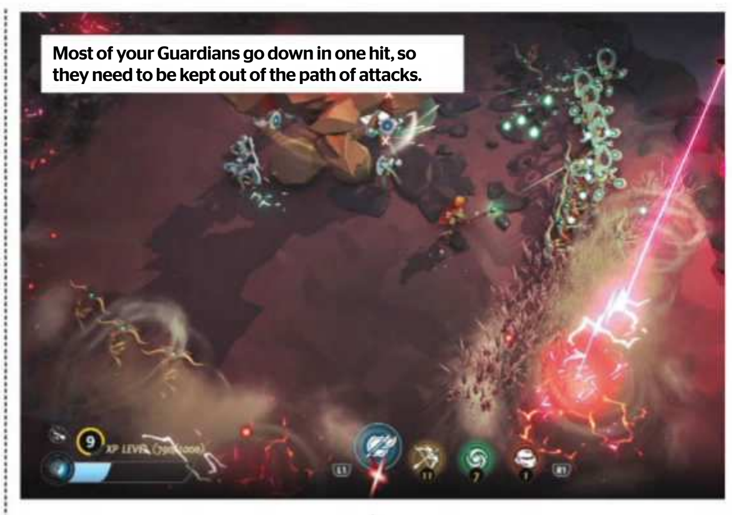

Why save the world all by yourself when you can delegate? In this fantasy adventure, you command an army of stone warriors, and discover that rarest of treasures: a strategy game that actually works on consoles.

Masters Of Anima succeeds by keeping things simple. You control the wizard Otto, who can run around and attack in typical action-RPG fashion. He, in turn, summons and orders around 'Guardians', golem-like minions.

For the most part, you'll command one category of warrior at a time, switching between them on the fly. With the click of a button you can order your archers to retreat, getting them clear of danger, before switching to your protectors and ordering them into the fray to take the heat while your mages fire away from some nearby cover.

Fans of Overlord or Pikmin will feel right at home here, though for our money Masters Of Anima is actually more precise and fluid than its clear inspirations. Warriors flow responsively from place to place at your command, making fights a tight, tactical thrill despite the limited control scheme.

Adding to this controlled feel are the enemies you face. The developer has wisely identified that pitting you against bustling hordes would result in a chaotic mess. Instead, you fight a handful of huge, towering monsters at a time, lumbering creatures whose slow, telegraphed, but devastatingly powerful attacks are far clearer than a hundred tiny sword strikes would be.


Most of your Guardians go down in one hit, so they need to be kept out of the path of attacks.

Master and commander

Outside of battles you use your minion's various special abilities to solve environmental puzzles. Though the powers at your disposal range from the straightforward to the arcane – archers, for example, can hit buttons far away, while mages can summon runes that ward away evil corruption – these challenges are unlikely to ever tax your brain, but they serve well enough as quieter moments between scraps.

The story wrapped around all this is largely a boilerplate affair, filled with tiresome archetypes and clunky exposition. its few novel twists (the damsel in distress, for example, must be rescued one part at a time – heart, then mind, then body) aren't enough to elevate it, though it does benefit from a very endearing protagonist in the dopey but determined Otto. His earnest dialogue, delivered in a thick regional accent, is at least likeable, even if it's not very interesting.

But wizardly nonsense aside, this is one of the defter real-time strategy games we've played with a pad. There may not be huge depth to its battles, but that simplicity is a strength – it allows wielding a hundred warriors to feel as satisfying and intuitive as swinging a sword.



■ ***Robin Valentine***

HOT DOWNLOADS

The latest DLC and expansions explored



The perpetually popular **Hearthstone** has another new expansion out this month: **The Witchwood.** This spooky addition brings 135 new cards and perhaps the most ridiculously named Blizzard character ever, Hagatha The Witch, to the game alongside Monster Hunts, a solo mode building on the previous expansion's Dungeon Run. New mechanics include Echo, which lets you play the same card multiple times in a turn, and minions whose attack and health swap back in forth each turn they're in your hand.

For those who prefer a more literal kind of monster hunt, it's time to gear up for **Monster Hunter: World's Spring Blossom Festival.** This update will transform the Astera hub with a flowery makeover, including a big Poogie lantern and the populace dressing up for the occasion. There will also be regular evening fireworks displays. To top it all off older event quests will be returning to give players who missed them the first time round to have another try. You'll also get two lucky vouchers as login bonuses per day instead of just one.

That's not the only co-op game getting some new additions, though **Metal Gear Survive's** don't come with a glowing flower pig ornament. Instead Konami has added a new mode to co-op called **Rescue Missions,** which are just as they sound, with players venturing out to save other soldiers out in the field. A great level of co-operation is said to be required to succeed, and it should inject some more life into the undead-slaying title.

Though if you're sad that Metal Gear Survive has no Snake, perhaps it's time to check out **Snake Pass.** The slithering puzzler is celebrating its first anniversary with the introduction of Arcade mode, which will allow players to compete on global leaderboards.

Prefer your competition a bit more high octane? Then **Gravel's** new DLC **A Race Of Ice And Fire** (we wonder which HBO show the dev is a fan of?) brings tracks set in Iceland to the game, including races under the Aurora Borealis, through remote fishing villages, and – appropriately – inside a dormant volcano.



THIS MONTH IN...
FREAKY FORESTS

April sees the release of Hearthstone's latest expansion, The Witchwood, a spooky battle between the denizens of the eponymous cursed forest, ruled by the evil Hagatha, and the werewolf inhabitants of the city of Gilneas. As well as 135 cards featuring some all-new mechanics, there's also a solo mode called Monster Hunt for all you Dungeon Run fans. For more info, check out p85.



Upgrading your regular folks to super-cyborg murderbots: it's the right thing for any evil, world-domination-craving corporation to do.

Legend #65 of Gaming

SYNDICATE

It's like if Google dropped the whole 'don't be evil' thing



You are a corporation, and you want to extend your business around the world. How do you do that? Why, by taking charge of a team of up to four cybernetically enhanced super-agents, all heavily armed and with your permission to do whatever they need to do to get the job done. Welcome to Syndicate, the 1993 real-time tactical title where corporations are gods.

The origins

The entire thought process behind Syndicate's creation was 'wouldn't it be fun to kill lots of things', and this idea from a few Bullfrog developers, drawn up in the pub one day, would remain pretty much set in stone from early development through to the finished product. You would go out there and kill, and you would never, ever be punished for doing just that – even if innocent civilians were caught in the crossfire. It was never encouraged, mind, but since when did that stop people?

The legend

We'd seen plenty of god games by 1993, and more than enough squad-based tactical shooters. Syndicate wasn't unique if you were just looking at the base-level What It Does factor. But it mixed a fantastic refinement of existing mechanics with presentation and atmosphere that we just hadn't encountered before. Satire, nihilism, a big ball of cynicism with a point – this was a game that fit nicely with the grunge-laced attitudes of Generation X.

Your corporate outings in Syndicate amounted to travelling the world, seeing new sights, and killing new people. There was a lot of killing. You might take on assassination missions – for example, the one where the new mayor of a town was loyal to another corporation, so you interrupted a ribbon-cutting ceremony *with guns*. You might hunt down enemy agents in hostile territory, *with guns*. Maybe you'd go on a reconnaissance mission to find out the lay of the land in an area the company wanted to expand into… *with guns*.

Developer Bullfrog
Publisher EA
Released 1993
Format PC, Jaguar, SNES, Mega Drive, Amiga
Get it On GOG.com or Origin

Syndicate was big on killing, and it would have been remembered if that were just the case. But Bullfrog threw in an element that made things even more interesting: the Persuadertron. (Yes, that is what it was called.) Every person in this dystopian nightmare had a chip in their head (fleshed out in the sequel to show that it projects an 'everything's fine' filter over an individual's perception). The Persuadertron hacked this chip and forced the individual in question to become immediately obedient to you.

What this meant in game terms is that you could, instead of shooting anybody, amass an army of civilians, police, guards, and even rival corporations' agents and have them all walking around you in a mass of mindless humanity. Yes, human shields were actively encouraged. Syndicate *did not care* about life.

This kind of freedom might seem quaint these days – we're not talking Metal Gear Solid V levels of open-world interaction – but Syndicate was a huge step forward when it came to these early experiments in open worlds. Yes, civilians

"A HUGE STEP FORWARD WHEN IT CAME TO THESE EARLY EXPERIMENTS IN OPEN WORLDS"

Syndicate still manages to bring a smile to your face with destruction like this.







The Persuadertron allows you to make hundreds of NPCs follow you.

just mill about, but they're *there*, cars drive around, traffic stops, police are on the beat. The illusion was very real.

The legacy

Syndicate was hugely popular, so the inevitable ports to other formats came. However, it wasn't handled too well when it came to versions on the Mega Drive and SNES, which toned down the violence, made the game look cartoony and ruined any semblance of strategy or fun there might once have been in the game. It was a shame, as most console owners missed out on a real gem. The rest of us, though, have been catered for very well by Syndicate over the years. We won't claim it still holds up as strategy gaming perfection – there are cheesy techniques to win quite easily (and lose just as easily), and elements such as pathfinding of your agents can border on joke territory. It shows its age.

And yet, Syndicate does still hold up as an engaging, enthralling, and subtly satirical title – even if it wasn't exactly meant to be. We've never heard anybody describe a hostile takeover as fun, but if they did you know they'd be talking about Syndicate. ■ ***Ian Dransfield***

Studio Spotlight

Bullfrog: best of British, sorely missed



1 Syndicate Wars

(PC, PS1 – 1996)

Given the first game's success it's no surprise a sequel landed in the form of Syndicate Wars. Sending things further into the future, adding a second playable faction, and making entire cities destructible – yep, Wars ramped everything up in the right way. The series hasn't been seen since, even if people do claim Starbreeze made an ill-advised spin-off in 2012... we can't recall that ever happening. *Ahem.*



2 Theme Park

(PC, PS1, SNES, Mega Drive, Amiga – 1994)

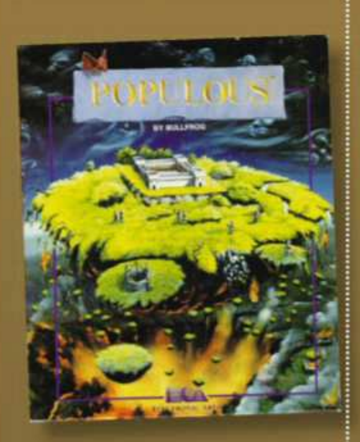
Bullfrog was notorious for introducing rather mean little elements to its games – even adorable park building simulator Theme Park wasn't immune. Want your customers to buy more drinks? Add salt to the chips. Worried you'll now sell out of cola? Water it down by adding more ice. People not eating enough burgers? Increased fat content makes the meaty treats even more addictive. Blissful, corporate naughtiness.



3 Dungeon Keeper

(PC – 1997)

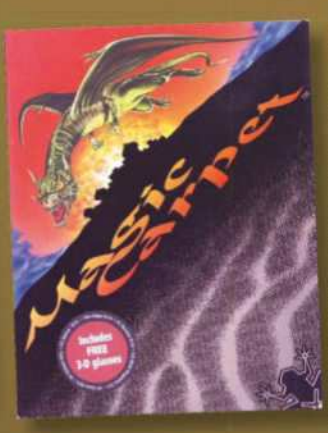
Who can be bothered being the good guy? It's much more fun to be bad. That's something Dungeon Keeper confirmed on its release. You're tasked with running a dungeon, enticing new and ever-more dangerous creatures into the dank halls, and keeping everyone happy. Oh, and slaughtering the annoying do-gooders who pop up periodically. Blissful evil.



4 Populous

(PC, SNES, Mega Drive, Amiga – 1989)

One of the original god games, when it launched Populous set a new standard for strategy titles on computers and consoles around the world. Tasking you with helping your 'peeps' grow in numbers – mainly by getting involved with some divine intervention such as causing earthquakes or floods – Populous was just one of those games that hit all the right notes at the exact right time. A genuine classic, and still beloved today.



5 Magic Carpet

(PC, PS1, Saturn – 1994)

It wasn't just strategy and top-down views from Bullfrog. The studio was also able to produce the likes of Magic Carpet, one of the earliest, most technically impressive 3D first-person shooters around, a game which saw you battling wizards and monsters from atop a flying rug. The action's difficult to get your head around these days, admittedly, but there's no doubt the game did a lot for a genre the studio wasn't really known for.





SIX OF THE BEST...

DOOM CLONES

And not a Quake in sight

Before we called them first-person shooters, they were 'Doom clones' – a term that was dropped 1) because it was a bit insulting to these other games that often had a lot of their own ideas, and 2) because it's impossible to call Quake a 'Doom clone' with a straight face.

Still, the mid-'90s was a very special time in PC gaming, when a real playfulness and wave of creativity washed over the world of these so-called Doom clones. Before the *really* big money got involved and dour war-based shooters became the be-all, end-all for the genre, there was innovation and experimentation, jetpacks and blasters, cowboys and... pork scratchings? With all that in mind, here are six of the very best first-person shooters from the 1990s – not mere copies, but retro classics in their own right. ■

STAR WARS: DARK FORCES

(PC, PS1 – 1995)

The original Dark Forces did a good job of mixing Doom with a Han Solo simulator, and saw you stealing plans, blasting Stormtroopers, and... well, blasting more of them. It's aged, but it's still great.

DUKE NUKEM 3D

(PC, N64, PS1, Saturn – 1996)

In 1996 Duke changed the way we thought about first-person shooters. Offering unparalleled exploration, inventiveness, and a sense of humour just on the right side of silly, it's an absolute legend. Shame about Forever...

BLOOD

(PC – 1997)

Built with the same engine as Duke Nukem 3D, Blood was a darker take on the genre. Darker than Doom itself, actually. Weapons ranged from shotguns through flaming aerosols, all the way up to voodoo dolls and Tesla cannons. Blood was... silly.

RISE OF THE TRIAD
(PC - 1995)

ROTT's development was led by Tom Hall, who literally wrote the Doom Bible. Originally meant as a Wolfenstein sequel, it soon became its own project. It introduced many features we take for granted today, such as smashable glass walls.

REDNECK RAMPAGE
(PC - 1997)

Redneck Rampage was also based on DN3D's engine, once again proving the term 'Doom clone' was a daft one. Nonetheless, this quite funny shooter brought together two good ol' boys to fight off an alien invasion. And eat pork rinds.

OUTLAWS
(PC - 1997)

Not only was Outlaws one of the few Western-styled first-person shooters ever, it was one of the first to introduce sniper scope zooming. Yes folks, before then we were all stuck with no-scoping, with absolutely no say in the matter. Sad times.

Grab Bag

Retro gems from every era

It's Still Good!



Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver

Format PC, Dreamcast, PS1 **Developer** Crystal Dynamics **Released** 1999

Some games age poorly, but not Soul Reaver. We won't claim it still looks fresh as a daisy, but it plays very well considering its age and is easy to recommend. Dimension-bending puzzles, smart combat, and a storyline from Uncharted's own Amy Hennig – you could do a lot worse than pick this one up on GOG or PSN.

Classic Moment!



Mega-Lo-Mania

Format PC, SNES, Mega Drive, Amiga **Developer** Sensible Software **Released** 1991

This classic RTS for the Amiga and consoles taught us all a brutal lesson about nuclear weapons. You could nuke your opposition for an instant kill, but fallout meant you couldn't build there, and the threat of nuclear countermeasures meant it wasn't just a cheat button. "We've nuked them!" never sounded so hollow.

Remake Request!



Anachronox

Format PC **Developer** Ion Storm **Released** 2001

Anachronox was a blend of Western cyberpunk style with JRPG mechanics and some of the smartest, quirkiest design ever seen in a game – your cursor was an actual in-game character and you recruited an entire planet to your party. However, it sadly underperformed on release. We'd love to see this underappreciated classic get a second chance.

Players select one of eight avatars, each with their own attributes. Skye, in red, sets missions.

TUNE IN TO THE FUTURE

Forget watching streamers on the net – **Last Commanders** is breaking down the boundaries between games and TV shows



Rogue AI Sciron has enslaved the Kaladian people with a virus that turns them into mindless husks.



We're all used to games giving us choices – where to go next, who to talk to, what to do, whether our hair should be green or purple. It's the beauty of the medium. But what if we took the freedom and interactivity that games offer and blended it into the realism of a TV show? That's what the ambitious new CBBC show Last Commanders aims to do.

Four teams of players participate from the comfort of their own homes, connecting via Skype to the dystopian sci-fi world of this first-person game/programme hybrid. They experience the action through the eyes and ears of their team's Avatar, and can talk directly with their virtual counterpart, directing them to complete missions.

"Imagine loading up Halo and controlling Master Chief through conversation and instruction rather than a control pad – it's a bit like that," explains development producer Ryan Meloy. "Oh, and Master Chief will converse back with you." Unlike the FPS, however, rather than having players running around in bullet-riddled worlds, logic and puzzle solving are the focus here.

The viewers can see things from the Avatar's point of view, and also get to watch the players' reactions to events. "In that sense, it's a little bit like an interactive Gogglebox," explains Meloy. For the players it's far from sitting in front of the TV with a cuppa, though – they only have one life, so there's plenty of tension.

What sets Last Commanders apart from similar game shows, such as Knightmare and The Crystal Maze, is how it mixes game show elements with an ongoing TV drama. Each episode takes its futuristic tale forward: "This was massively ambitious as it meant a whole story had to be crafted and the set was required to look like ten different locations," says Meloy. The story follows Skye and her band of rebels as they take on Sciron, an all-powerful rogue AI. "The players come into it as a kind of Mission Control for the Avatars," explains Meloy. "They must call upon all their ingenuity and cunning to help the Avatars through each mission. As well as engage in lots of funny banter, of course!"

Meloy explains the team wanted the show to mimic a videogame, giving players the same seamless experience as they have in a virtual world. "We wanted to avoid having any producers or parents sitting in the room with the kids interrupting their flow. If that happened they wouldn't be themselves and we'd have lost those brilliantly honest reactions of joy and terror."

Last Commanders sounds like a videogame too. A fan of the Dust: An Elysian Tale soundtrack, Meloy reached out to the composer, HyperDuck, to provide the musical tones for the show. "We would basically give them the set up for each episode. Every time they sent through what they'd been working on there was a real buzz in the office as the music felt so filmic and atmospheric."

The kids are all fright

While it looks like an FPS, the feel of Last Commanders is closer to survival horror games of old. (Just what

"THERE'S NOTHING FUNNIER THAN SEEING OTHER PEOPLE JUMPING IN FEAR!"



Last Commanders is something of a modern evolution of the '80s show Knightmare.



A highlight for players and viewers are the jump scares. This guy certainly gives us the heebie-jeebies.



Cybers are Sciron's basic foot soldiers. 'Reliable, obedient, and entirely controllable', they're strong and never tire. We could do with a few of these on Team GM...



growing kids need, eh?) "The early Resident Evil games were so brutally tough with the Ink Ribbon save system," says Meloy. "It brought a real sense of heightened terror knowing that there was no safety net of auto-saving. That element of there being no second chances was something we wanted to have in there as it meant the jeopardy for the kids was really magnified. You see that in the chase sequences when the kids are screaming at the top of their lungs for the Avatar to 'Run!'"

Although the show is primarily aimed at youngsters aged nine to 14, Meloy sees the show spanning a variety of ages and interests. "There's more than enough subtle references for gamers and movie fans to enjoy. And anyone who enjoys seeing people get scared will love seeing how excited and tense the kids get when playing."

Watching the players jump and shout is, we admit, one of the best things about the programme – we're just as bad when gaming ourselves. "We needed there to be a threat for the players and an element of excitement and humour for the viewers," explains Meloy. "For the players, they are genuinely scared but also thrilled, and for the viewers, there is a real tension in the viewing experience as well as a sense of fun – there's nothing funnier than seeing other people scared and jumping in fear!"



Since its launch earlier this year, the reception from both children and adults has been positive. Meloy hopes that the show will continue to scare kids for some time to come. "It's great to see viewers pick out their favourite Avatar and really embrace the story of the show. I've also seen a fair few adults on Twitter admitting to watching the show and enjoying the story, humour, and reaction of the kids. Hopefully, it keeps on drawing in an audience and we can take all we've learned and come back for a second series." ■ ***Anne-Marie Coyle***



GLOBAL MASTER

Grab yourself a sweet gaming treat



DUAL-CHOC

This solid Belgian milk chocolate games controller from Friars is lovingly shaped to resemble a PlayStation pad. While it's guaranteed to keep hunger pangs at bay, it probably won't do much to keep your game character alive.

PACKED MAN

Don't let Pan-Man have all the fun; grab yourself this officially licensed tin in the shape of his ghost nemesis Blinky. It's filled with sour cherry candies, or, if raspberry is more your jam, you can chomp down on the 'Turned Blue' version.

BAR O' CROFT

Ms Croft has graced many random objects, including these treats by True Confections. Available in chocolate, crispy chocolate, caramel, and peanut butter flavours, each bar features a different image of the famous explorer. Considering these were released in 1999, eating them now would probably result in an adventure to the hospital.

GET INVOLVED

SIGN UP TO THE



NEWSLETTER TODAY!



RECEIVE ALL THIS AND MORE!




Behind the scenes news



Awesome special offers



Exclusive competitions

SIGN UP NOW!

bit.ly/gmnewsletter



NEXT MONTH...

GamesMaster 330

ON SALE 17 MAY

INSIDE NEXT ISSUE...

MARIO TENNIS Aces

The hottest gaming news, previews, and reviews every month!



SPIDER-MAN



SHADOW OF THE TOMB RAIDER



NINTENDO LABO

PLUS LOADS MORE!

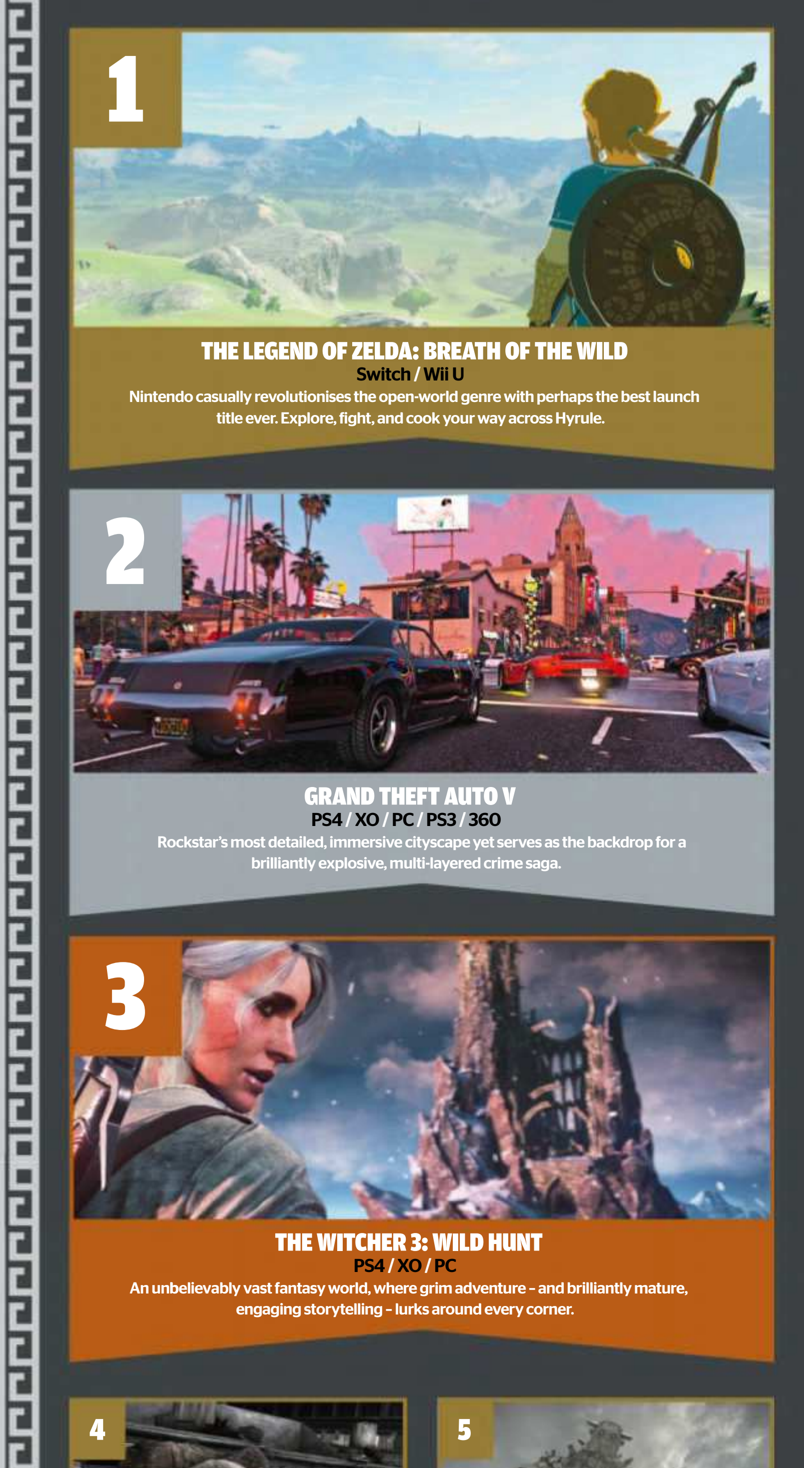
Due to the unpredictable nature of the gaming world, all contents are subject to change.

GamesMaster

GAME GUIDE

Our definitive list of the best games to play right now

Not sure which games to grab? Trust the experts (that's us) to shine a light of clarity through your fog of confusion. Over this spread you'll find GamesMaster's 100 per cent scientifically accurate and indisputable list of the greatest games on modern machines – updated monthly – as well as the top five most vital exclusives on each of the major platforms. Pick one of these up and, buddy, you're going to have yourself a good time.



1

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD
Switch / Wii U
Nintendo casually revolutionises the open-world genre with perhaps the best launch title ever. Explore, fight, and cook your way across Hyrule.



2

GRAND THEFT AUTO V
PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360
Rockstar's most detailed, immersive cityscape yet serves as the backdrop for a brilliantly explosive, multi-layered crime saga.



3

THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT
PS4 / XO / PC
An unbelievably vast fantasy world, where grim adventure – and brilliantly mature, engaging storytelling – lurks around every corner.



4

THE LAST OF US
PS4 / PS3
Naughty Dog's greatest triumph yet: the dark and truly cinematic tale of Joel and Ellie, two survivors in a dying world.



5

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS
PS4
A perfect remake of a genuinely awe-inspiring adventure. So good we gave it our first ever 100% review score back in GM327.



DARK SOULS III
PS4 / XO / PC
Take on some of gaming's most unforgiving enemies in weighty, impactful battles. There are few games more satisfying to beat.



PERSONA 5
PS4 / PS3
The greatest JRPG on current-gen – a stylish, rebellious story of teenage fury and surreal journeys into your enemies' minds.



8

MONSTER HUNTER WORLD
PS4 / XO / PC

The once-cult series finally hit the mainstream with this stunning entry. Hunt big dinosaurs with your mates and make armour from their bits!



9

HORIZON: ZERO DAWN
PS4

A truly unique vision from the creators of Killzone. Primitive humans hunt robotic beasts across a beautiful wilderness.



10

SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY
Switch / Wii U

Switch's first Mario game is also one of the best ever, taking you on an unashamedly joyous, globe-trotting adventure.



11

UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END
PS4

An incredible end to one of the most spectacular series around, seeing Nathan Drake off in style. One of the best-looking games ever made.



12

FORZA MOTORSPORT 7
XO / PC

The best entry in the series yet, and one of the greatest racing games ever made. It's absolutely gorgeous to boot.



13

OVERWATCH
PS4 / XO / PC

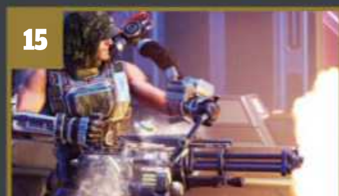
Colourful characters and slick shooting make this multiplayer FPS from the makers of World Of Warcraft utterly irresistible.



14

MARIO KART 8
Switch / Wii U

The definitive kart racer, now portable and packed with new features on Switch. Own a Nintendo console? This is a must-have.



15

XCOM 2
PS4 / XO / PC

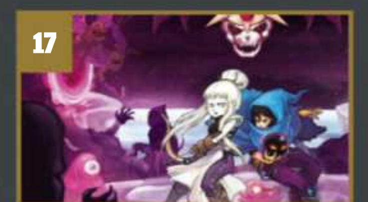
A turn-based strategy masterpiece that doesn't pull its punches. Try not to get too attached to your soldiers, eh?



16

MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOW OF WAR
PS4 / XO / PC

Solid third-person action elevated by its incredible system of procedurally-generated orcs, each with their own personality.



17

TOWERFALL ASCENSION
Switch / PS4 / XO / PC / PS Vita

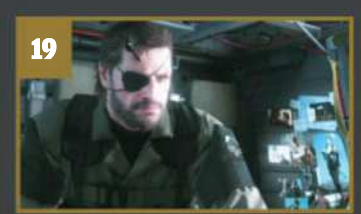
A true legend of local multiplayer action that still eats up our office lunchtimes to this day. The very definition of easy to learn, hard to master.



18

HELLBLADE: SENUA'S SACRIFICE
PS4 / PC

A harrowing journey into a mythological underworld serves as the perfect backdrop to an exploration of real-world mental illness.



19

METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN
PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360

Hideo Kojima's last hurrah brings open-world action to the revered series.



20

DOTA 2
PC

A strange and intimidating beast - but take the time to learn its secrets and you'll find a game of incredible tactical depth and variety.



21

HEARTHSTONE
PC / Mobile

Blizzard achieves the once-impossible - making deck-building CCGs accessible to all. Prepare to lose all your free time in 15-minute chunks.



22

MARIO + RABBIDS KINGDOMS BATTLE
Switch

Don't let its cute looks fool you - this is a tight and devilishly difficult turn-based strategy game.



BLOODBORNE
PS4

Dark Souls' more agile cousin, tighter and faster but no less punishing, in a world of gothic horror and Lovecraftian nightmares.



24

RESIDENT EVIL 7: BIOHAZARD
PS4 / XO / PC

First-person horror action that both pays fitting tribute to the series' past, and tries something totally different. Even more terrifying in VR.



25

PYRE
PS4 / PC

This spellbinding follow-up to Bastion seamlessly blends intricate storytelling with... well, magical basketball, basically. Trust us, it works.

THE TOP EXCLUSIVES
The five best for each console



1. FORZA MOTORSPORT 7
2. HALO 5: GUARDIANS
3. KALIMBA
4. QUANTUM BREAK
5. GEARS OF WAR 4



1. THE LAST OF US REMASTERED
2. SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS
3. HORIZON: ZERO DAWN
4. UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END
5. HELLBLADE



1. THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD
2. SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY
3. MARIO KART 8 DELUXE
4. MARIO + RABBIDS KINGDOM BATTLE
5. ARMS



1. DOTA 2
2. TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER II
3. GUILD WARS 2
4. THE SIMS 4
5. CRUSADER KINGS 2



1. POKÉMON SUN AND MOON
2. FIRE EMBLEM FATES
3. ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW LEAF
4. MONSTER HUNTER GENERATIONS
5. THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK BETWEEN WORLDS



1. HEARTHSTONE
2. DEVICE 6
3. 80 DAYS
4. SORCERY 4
5. MONUMENT VALLEY

IDIOT BOX

When the wait for Nintendo Labo became unbearable, Team GM had no choice but to make our own cardboard-based games. How hard could it be?



CARDBOARD PRIME

Don't *play* Samus; *be* Samus. This authentic Metroid get-up lets you play a full VR shooter in your own home. Well, you can point the gun at people and say 'pew', at least.

BUSINESS SIMULATOR

Now *you're* the boss, baby! With this set, you can live the life of a real businessman, complete with Business Hat™, Business Mug™, and Appropriately Fun Tie™. Buy buy buy! Sell sell sell! I'll pencil you in for a meeting!

SUPER GIDDY-UP

Explore a vast open world from atop your loyal steed! By which we mean wander around the town centre shouting 'Woah nelly!' at a cardboard box. Comes with bonus Spend The Night In A Police Cell DLC.